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# **DISCURSIVE DISSONANCE: CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY FOR SUPERVISION**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Education**

at

**The University of Waikato**

by

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## **Abstract**

When practitioners and supervisors do not share the same counselling language or theoretical orientation, how is shared meaning achieved and relational connection sustained in supervision? How are differences in theoretical orientation negotiated in supervision in ways that open space for collaborative, generative dialogue and critical reflection on the politics of practice? In response to these questions, this thesis presents a critical, reflexive practitioner-inquiry exploring the possibilities and limitations a social constructionist and narrative approach to supervision makes possible for students learning apolitical, humanistic approaches to counselling.

Positioned in theoretical landscapes of social constructionism, feminist poststructuralism and Narrative Therapy, this study is a reflection-in-action of a supervisor's practice. Central to the study's argument is discursive positioning theory; the associated concepts of relational identity, authorship and agency; and the self as a storying subject. Two student counsellors and two newly qualified counsellors, whose practice was shaped by structuralist, humanistic theories, and who were already engaged in supervision, participated in the study. Employing narrative practices of co-inquiry to generate data, a series of supervision sessions were recorded, reviewed individually by supervisor and practitioner/participant and later discussed in reflective/research meetings. Using a critically reflexive approach to discourse analysis, selected data-texts were explored for moments of discursive dissonance and moments of movement in practice development and professional identity.

Research findings highlighted the need for explicit supervision working agreements, theoretical transparency, and encouragement by counsellor training/education providers for students to make fuller use of supervision as a critical learning space. It identifies three processes that might inform supervision when theoretical orientations are non-aligned. These are: supervision as critical reflexivity, supervision as a socio-political conversation, and supervision as a storying practice.

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*Ireni Esler*  
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## Chapter 1: Setting the scene

I have struggled with writing this chapter more than any of the others...My tussles have been with the pros and cons of starting with an ‘ideas’ chapter. It seems important to ‘set the scene’ by embedding my work within its histories, cultures, and contexts. The practice of research is akin to a series of conversations and it seems useful to locate this entry in relation to the ongoing dialogue. (Speedy, 2008, p.1)

Just as Jane Speedy<sup>1</sup> (2008) struggled with writing her introductory chapter, I too have struggled with how best to set the scene for the story of my thesis. It seemed important to embed my research questions in the histories, cultures, and contexts of my supervision practice. Rather than locating the theoretical basis for my study in a discrete theoretical chapter, I provide an overview of the study in this chapter with sufficient theoretical ground so that the practice dilemmas I present are clearly positioned as discursive productions. I first set out the research questions which arose from my interdiscursive supervision dilemmas and introduce myself and the theoretical ground on which my practice is located. I explain the professional context which gave rise to my practice dilemmas, namely, counselling supervision. I next describe the methodological approach I used and address ethical issues arising from practice-based research. I offer a rationale for the significance of this study before finally mapping the direction for the rest of the thesis document. In the next two chapters, I develop the professional context of the inquiry and provide a more detailed discussion of the philosophical and theoretical landscapes on which this study stands.

The encompassing philosophical and theoretical perspectives of my practice and this study are those which shape Narrative Therapy. It has been suggested that the passage of Narrative Therapy from its origins in Australia and New Zealand to

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis follows the APA 5<sup>th</sup> edition referencing style. However, in the spirit of troubling the edges, I thought it important to alert the reader to some deviation from the orthodoxy of this convention. The first time I introduce an author, I include their first name. In subsequent references, only the surname is used. In addition to direct quotations, I use speech marks to indicate widely used concepts, for example “sparkling moments” (White, 2007).

many other parts of the world, can be thought of as a metaphorical kind of translation from one language/culture to another (Epston, 2010). I draw extensively from the work of Michael White and David Epston (1990), co-founders of Narrative Therapy. Their transportation and translation of complex poststructural theories into cultures of therapy, social work and community practice, have shaped my professional practice significantly and opened up different kinds of dialogues between practitioners in a wide variety of practice situations.

This study also draws on previous transportation and translation of the narrative metaphor from counselling practice into supervision practice (Behan, 2003a; Crocket, 2001; 2004b; Speedy, 2000). Poststructuralist ideas of positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) and the concepts of agency and authorship (Davies, 1991) have been transported into narrative approaches to counselling (Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997; Winslade, 2005), supervision (Crocket, 2002; 2007), mediation (Winslade & Monk, 2000, 2008) and counsellor education (Winslade, Crocket, Monk, & Drewery, 2000). These poststructural ideas are also central theoretical ideas for this study.

### **Research questions**

From the complexities arising in supervision when theory/practice positions of supervisor and practitioner are non-aligned, I developed the following questions:

- 1. What opportunities and limitations do social constructionist and narrative approaches to supervision make possible for students learning humanistic-oriented approaches to counselling?**
- 2. What are the relational effects of an interdiscursive supervision practice?**
- 3. How are differences in theoretical orientations negotiated in supervision in ways that open space for collaborative, generative dialogue and reflection on practice?**

I turn now to contextualise these questions in the histories, cultures and dilemmas of my professional supervision practice.

## **Introducing myself as practitioner-researcher**

Since the early 1970s, well before I came to know about social constructionism and Narrative Therapy, feminist understandings of power relations shaped my personal and professional worldview. Feminism offered a counter-story to the dominant gender discourses commonly available to young women at that time (Morgan, 1970). While there are many different forms of feminism, I agree with the sentiments of Vivien Burr (1998): “Gender is the backcloth against which our daily lives are played out. It suffuses our existence so that, like breathing, it becomes invisible to us because of its familiarity” (p. 2). A feminist analysis serves me well in the various personal and professional subjectivities I have occupied in my life. In my past work as a teacher, social worker, family therapist, social services manager, counsellor and supervisor, I have sought to speak against practices of inequality, discrimination, oppression and abuse. My interest in making visible invisible gendered discourses in my professional work originates from my own lived experiences as a Pākehā<sup>2</sup> middle-class woman and from my understanding of the effects of patriarchy and power in the (his)tory of the world. I acknowledge that living in Aotearoa<sup>3</sup> New Zealand most of my life I have experienced more privilege and agency than discrimination and oppression.

In bringing a socio-political awareness into my practice, I am careful to draw distinctions between a politically aware counselling practice and a moralising counselling practice. Paying attention to the impact of political and social discourses is not the same as imposing one’s political and social views (Monk & Gehart, 2003; Winslade, 2005). In supervision, I seek to maintain a socio-political focus and a professional practice focus while enacting accountability for clients’ welfare, practitioners’ practice, and professional and public responsibilities. Holding multiple foci in supervision is complex and complicated (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006)—particularly so when supervisor and counsellor hold different theoretical and political understandings about the purposes and nature of counselling.

Finding ways to speak difference in supervision when theoretical orientations are

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<sup>2</sup> New Zealander of European descent.

<sup>3</sup> The Māori name for New Zealand

non-aligned is the focus of this study. I employ the term “speaking difference” not to invoke a binary position of right or wrong, but to describe an action of locating myself in different therapeutic discourses. I agree with Todd May (2005) that difference is not so much a problem to be solved but a condition of life:

Difference is there, always. It is immanent to our present and returning to us from our future. We explore and experiment, not in order to reflect this world, but in order better to embrace it. (p.171)

It is the practice of “speaking difference” that I explore in this study. From a generalised concern and discomfort about the non-contextualised and de-politicised approaches to therapy that were being presented in supervision, I undertook this research project to identify and analyse specific moments of discursive dissonance. Holding the tension and discomfort produced by difference, without abandoning what is of value to me and without causing relational disconnection, is a personal and professional goal. I now move to the study itself and provide an overview of the processes involved.

### **Overview of the study**

I embarked on this study in order to better understand the difficulties I experienced in supervision when theoretical orientations were non-aligned. I wanted to research my own supervision practice in order to learn from those practitioners most affected by my practice. Four research participants joined me and over the course of nine months, I video-recorded three supervision sessions with each participant and transferred the video recording onto DVDs for them to review individually. Reflective/research meetings took place one month later with each participant where the focus was on the supervision experiences of the practitioner/participant. I interviewed each participant about her reflections on supervision in the narrative tradition of consulting your consultants (Epston & White, 1992). I also video-recorded these reflective meetings and I repeated this cycle three times with each participant. As action-research, each reflective/research meeting produced knowledge that was taken back into subsequent supervision sessions. A carefully planned and edited letter that drew on narrative traditions (White & Epston, 1990) was sent to participants after each reflective/research meeting summarising their reflections about supervision and

any further understandings co-generated in the research meeting (see Appendix 6). This process of action-reflection-action ended with a final group meeting, also recorded for research data.

Analysing research data through a critically reflexive lens, my interpretations of those analyses suggest that social constructionist and narrative approaches to supervision do offer practitioners opportunities for professional practice development. However, I found that it was not always possible to speak into spaces between theoretical difference; that the binaries between a depoliticised, humanistic view and a feminist, narrative view were more complex than I had imagined. In Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, I present layered accounts of stories of practice where movement did occur in moments of dissonance. These shifts were achieved by holding the tension of difference while reaching for shared meanings. As a result of this study, I have a greater appreciation for the complexities, opportunities, and limitations of a theoretically non-aligned supervision practice. My hopes are that this learning will be useful for supervision practice and for other professional contexts such as supervision research and counsellor training/education.

## **Professional counselling supervision**

Professional supervision is widely practised across many helping professions as an assumed means of maintaining professional standards, competence, quality assurance, and public accountability. The focus of this study is counselling supervision. The New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) describes supervision thus:

The purpose of professional supervision is for counsellors to reflect on and develop effective and ethical practice. It also has a monitoring purpose with regard to counsellors' work. Supervision includes personal support, mentoring professional identity development and reflection upon the relationships between persons, theories, practices, work contexts and cultural perspectives. (NZAC, 2002, p.33)

Counselling is not a value-neutral activity. Members of the NZAC are committed to respecting diversity and promoting social justice through advocacy and

empowerment; to learning about and taking account of the diverse cultural contexts and practices of the clients with whom they work; and to supporting their clients to challenge any injustices they experience (NZAC, 2002). Therefore, counselling is concerned with cultural, social and political issues whether these are overtly acknowledged in therapeutic conversations or remain hidden (Hare-Mustin, 1994).

As an accredited NZAC supervisor, I assume a shared commitment with practitioners in supervision with me to some kind of critical engagement with theories, practices and broad social and cultural perspectives. I consider it important to understand how our practice is connected to theory and to reflect on how a particular action is linked to a particular way of thinking. I am interested in ontological and epistemological knowledge: what knowledges underpin our practice and how did these knowledges come into existence. I am interested in the assumptions, values and beliefs which “live in the discursive background” (Winslade, 2005, p.354) of professional conversations, including my own. I ask questions about the effects of particular knowledges for people’s lives: what are the effects of particular theories of personality, or pathology, or particular ways of thinking about people, problems and change. Frequently, student counsellors I meet in supervision have not considered the constructed nature of the knowledges they are employing and I raise such questions as curious discussion not as interrogation.

A concern for how knowledge is produced leads me onto the philosophical and theoretical landscapes underpinning my supervision practice and this study. These philosophies and theories have shaped my professional and personal understandings variously over several decades.

### **Philosophies and theories which shape this study**

The overarching philosophical orientation of this study is Postmodernism (Lyotard, 1984), from which Social Constructionism (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1994; 1999; Shotter, 1993; 2004), Poststructuralism (Foucault, 1972), Feminist Poststructuralism (Davies, 1991; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Weedon, 1987), Discursive Positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), and Critical Reflexivity (Davies et al., 2004; Pillow, 2003; St. Pierre & Pillow,

2000) are key theoretical orientations. Narrative Therapy (White, 2007) is the central theoretical and therapeutic orientation of my counselling and supervision practice. I introduce these key theoretical orientations here and explore them in more detail in Chapter 3.

### **Narrative Therapy**

Narrative Therapy has shaped my professional practice for several decades. As a feminist, I was drawn to a narrative approach early in my professional career because I understood it to be a deconstructive, political approach to therapy, indebted to feminism. In narrative practice, problems are understood to be produced within socio-cultural contexts, rather than resulting from an individual, family, or community deficit. It is a therapeutic approach which emphasises how persons contribute to their own preferences for living as well as deconstructing the effects of subjectifying ideas and generalised dominant discourses (White, 1991). In narrative language, inviting people to speak to what is precious and of value to them assists them to become active mediators of their own circumstances, and to become active authors of their own life's stories. Narrative Therapy allows me to work in ways that are congruent with a feminist, socio-political understanding of the world and in ways that are respectful of people's contribution to their own life stories.

The concept that identity is a dialogic achievement produced in and through language in relation to others, is central to this study. Identity as a storying subject and as a socially negotiated achievement (Gergen, 1994; White, 2007) is a foundational construct for Narrative Therapy. Conceptualising identity as a storying subject, a self which moves between different discourses and occupies different subject positions, relies on a social constructionist approach to knowledge production and a poststructural understanding of discourse and power. Through examining and revising our relationship with problems, and with particular social and cultural discourses that construct us in particular ways, richer possibilities for our identity open up (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

### **Social Constructionism**

The claim that persons contribute to their own lives in therapeutic conversations depends on a social constructionist understanding of the production of knowledge (Burr, 2003). Located in a postmodern paradigm, Social Constructionism rejects



the certainty of any objective truth, including generalised professional truths claims. From a social constructionist perspective, knowledge is produced culturally, historically and relationally between people in conversation (Gergen, 1994; Shotter, 1993). Thus, who we believe ourselves to be, our self-knowledge, can be revisited and renegotiated through interaction with others. If language determines experience (Burr, 2003) then how we are positioned by language will determine how we may exercise power in relation to others.

### **Feminist Poststructuralism**

Over the last two decades, I have become interested in poststructuralist feminist theory for it has offered a robust critique of the lack of power analysis in mainstream psychology, research and therapy (Davies, 1991; 1992; Fraser, 1989; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994; Weedon, 1987). Positioning theory and the concepts of agency and authorship (Davies, 1991) have offered me further understanding of the constitutive effects of language-in-use. Bronwyn Davies (1991) argued that recognising the discourses by which we are constituted enables us to intentionally position ourselves in those discourses. She suggested that this recognition was a prerequisite “to bring about fundamental changes in the possible ways of being that are available to oneself and others” (p.52). From a poststructuralist feminist perspective, exercising power is to engage in the very act of choosing to speak, to accept, resist, or subvert the discourses which constitute us as particular kinds of persons. Discovering the possibility of *authorship* and to speak into the discourses that construct us in particular ways and as particular types of persons is to exercise *agency*. This particular understanding of agency has relevance for counselling and supervision.

Language is also of interest in narrative practice because different ways of speaking about ourselves or others produce different types of subjectivities (Drewery, 2005). As articulated by Kathie Crocket (1999, 2001) when counsellors speak from a position of *authorship* (Davies, 1991), they take up positions as storying subjects in their own meaning-making as “moral agents”. Speaking from a position of authorship changes how we think about ourselves, and also changes the discourses through which, and within which, we are constituted. From a poststructuralist perspective then, discourse can be used to bring about personal and social change because relations of power operate between persons in all

interactions at every level of engagement. As we speak we exchange pieces of discourse in the very moment of making an utterance in a conversation (Winslade, 2005). Narrative approaches to supervision pay attention to the effects of these utterances and how particular ways of thinking and speaking shape particular ways of thinking and performing our professional identity.

### **Narrative approaches to supervision**

Knowing how persons take up positions in relation to one another, or make shifts in their professional identity is of particular interest in a narrative supervision practice. My task as supervisor is to make speaking positions available in supervision for practitioners to actively story their counselling practice and their professional identity on ethically sound terms. I work to increase discursive options for practitioners without imposing my preferred narrative practice. At times, it is difficult to find a shared understanding when our theoretical orientations are not shared. My challenge at these times is to find ways of speaking into difference without abusing my position as supervisor. For example, raising socio-political concerns in a humanistic, de-politicised discourse, without ignoring or smoothing over difference, is a relationally sensitive endeavour. How I position myself in these moments that are imbued with interdiscursive tension, while attending to my ethical responsibilities as a supervisor, is a key focus of this study.

With this philosophical and theoretical ground laid out, I now describe an area of my professional work where I experienced discursive dissonance in teaching and supervising counselling students.

### **Contextualising my practice dilemmas**

Although my professional practice is shaped by a social constructionist and narrative perspective, my desire is not to be trapped within the discourse of a particular community or to put at risk possibilities for communicating across discourses (Little, Jordens, & Sayers, 2003). In my professional practice, I have been consulted by multidisciplinary health teams and I have taught narrative approaches to counselling and supervision to practitioners whose practice is located in different discursive communities.

For several years, I taught a short introductory course to Narrative Therapy for a

mainly humanistic-informed counsellor training programme. Narrative ideas and practices were not familiar to most of the students and I found it challenging to teach only what was most relevant without overwhelming students, or misrepresenting Narrative Therapy. Teaching Narrative Therapy without introducing its theoretical paradigms, risks reducing narrative practice to technical skill. For example, externalising questions, re-authoring conversations or outsider witnessing practices are powerful discursive strategies (White, 2007). These practices have specific purposes and intentions and are located in social constructionist understandings about knowledge production and poststructuralist understandings of power relations.

My challenge also lay with the counselling approaches being taught in the programme that were dissonant with narrative constructionist approaches. Humanistic existentialism, Person-Centred counselling, TA<sup>4</sup> and Systemic approaches, such as those the students were learning (see for example, Berne, 1964; Breunlin, Schwartz, & Mac Kune-Karrer, 1992; Harris, 1974; Rogers, 1980) suggest that therapists can hold certainties about people, personality, pathology and therapeutic interventions. From a social constructionist and narrative perspective, holding certainties about persons and their situations can produce what Melissa Griffith (1995) referred to as “the entrapment of knowing” (p.125). If we think we know about a person’s life, their emotions, thoughts and experiences, we can become “experts” about them and close off therapeutic possibilities for change. From a narrative perspective, holding certainty about persons and engaging in assessment, diagnosing or hypothesising practices may ignore local and subjective knowledges that could contribute to change (White & Epston, 1990).

In using the term “certainty”, I am referring to an approach towards knowledge that calls on generalised, objective truth claims; a *knowing-that*, or a knowing-about rather than a *knowing-with* (Shotter, 1993). A social constructionist approach to therapy takes into account a person’s knowledges and the broader social, cultural and political production of knowledge. It is this difference between a posture of certainty and a posture of uncertainty or contingency that I find most

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<sup>4</sup> Transactional Analysis

challenging when communicating with practitioners whose practised is shaped by structuralist theories. I am not suggesting a binary position here—it is the fluidities of certainties and uncertainties that I draw attention to. I do not hold an uncertainty about the *process* of counselling, or about particular moral values and commitments: rather I prefer to hold a position of curiosity about persons' lives, their lived experiences, and their skills and resources for living.

I was also an approved supervisor for this counsellor training programme and students often engaged me for supervision after attending the Narrative Therapy course I taught. I assumed that narrative ideas and practices resonated with those students seeking supervision and they had had a chance to get to know me before engaging me as their supervisor. However, in spite of our prior connection, I found that when students reproduced practices of certainty in supervision, in places where I might prefer contingency, I was further stretched to hold fast to discursive flexibility, while engaging with the certainties of other therapeutic approaches. In order to generate collaborative practice, I invited students to hold their certainties lightly, and to explore postures of curiosity and inquiry. I tried to focus on local and specific knowledges, often asking students for clients' expressions or meanings of experience. Frequently, I was caught between whether to offer or withhold useful ideas located in my different theoretical paradigm. For example, when student counsellors spoke of a client as having a “manipulative personality” or “an anxiety disorder”, I wondered how I might open up less diagnostic terms.

Assisting student counsellors to monitor and evaluate their practice in one paradigm while encouraging them to widen and increase their discursive options in another may seem transgressive. I use the term transgressive in the meaning ascribed by Norman Fairclough (1992). According to Fairclough (1992), moving within and between different discourses involves “crossing boundaries, subverting dominant knowledges, and inventing new forms of transgressions and combinations” (p.99). I wanted to subvert dominant knowledges without causing relational disconnection or moving away from my commitment to collaborative practice.

It is not my intention in this study to devalue the worthiness of humanism or

criticise integrative, humanistic informed counselling or those who hold these theoretical worldviews. Liberal humanistic values are not unworthy. However, from a feminist poststructural perspective, as Nicola Gavey (1998) noted, it is the “absence of metatheoretical concerns about power [that] render them insufficient” (p.461). Therapies that lack an analysis of power in areas such as gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientations are unsatisfactory for me. I hold a view that therapy is a socio-political practice and not only an individualistic or intrapsychic endeavour, separate from its conditions of existence.

I had been working in this professional context for several years and all past students in supervision with me had successfully graduated—some continuing in supervision with me. However, the dissonance and the complexity of non-aligned theoretically supervision continued to trouble me. I wanted to know if the supervision I was offering was ethically sound, especially for students learning different counselling theories and practices. This study sought to explore those disturbances through the research questions listed on page 2. To investigate my questions, I designed a research process using narrative co-inquiry, critical reflexivity, and a discursive approach to analysis, which I now briefly describe. I revisit the research methodology and design in Chapter 4.

### **A reflexive research project**

This study was a practitioner-inquiry, a form of research which is designed to produce knowledge-in-context for the development of practice (McLeod, 2003). The primary focus was to gain further understanding about aspects of my supervision practice that caused concern. According to John Dewey ([1910]1997), it is only when practitioners confront material, which produces a “feeling of a discrepancy” or is “problematic and unusually perplexing”, that they become “authentically reflective” (p.74). He suggested these moments might “present as shock, as emotional disturbance”, or they might be “vague feelings of the unexpected” (p.73).

With two student counsellors and two newly qualified counsellors already engaged in supervision with me, I set out to research the effects for professional practice when different theoretical cultures and languages converge in supervision. I came to understand the complexity of an interdiscursive supervision

by deliberately troubling moments of “emotional disturbance” in my practice. I intentionally centred participants’ experiences of supervision in the reflective/research conversations. I sought to offer speaking positions that enabled them to speak freely of their supervision experiences without my experiences overly shaping their reflections. I offer further reflection on the effects of this positioning in Chapter 9.

As a doctoral project as well as a practitioner-inquiry, I considered it was my responsibility to select, interpret and re-present research data in relation to my research questions. In the results chapters, I offer my interpretations of selected data-texts. Using a critical reflexivity to turn language “back on itself to take a critical view” (Steier, 1991, p.163), I examined my own speaking and internal dialogue. Employing reflexivities of discomfort to “disturb the disturbances” themselves (Pillow, 2003, p.18), I became aware of the slippages and contradictions in my practice when trying to hold multiple foci and to speak difference in supervision. For example, I noticed times when a duty of care towards a client, obscured my duty of care towards my supervision partner. I describe these occasions as moments when I privileged a politics of client practice over a politics of supervision practice. By interrupting the familiar and the taken-for-granted in my practice, I came to appreciate the complexity of an interdiscursive supervision practice and the complexity of the task I had set myself in my research inquiry.

I now address the power relations in practitioner-inquiry when research participants are also practitioners engaged in a professional service with the researcher.

### **The ethics of practitioner-research**

Whilst it may be less ethically complicated to interview ex-clients (Etherington, 2001) or other practitioners’ clients (Gaddis, 2002; Vallance, 2005; West & Clark, 2004), my aim for this study was to investigate my practice in order to examine the dissonance arising in my practice. Researching supervision with counsellors engaged in supervision is considered a robust form of reflection-on-practice. William West and Valerie Clark (2004) suggested that the standard of supervision is raised when supervisors and counsellors review supervision together

collaboratively. Seeking to raise the standard of my own supervision practice, I reviewed my practice with practitioners engaged in supervision and designed a research process that took account of potential ethical dilemmas.

As researcher, I wanted my research practice to mirror the same ethos of care that I strive for in my supervision practice. Therefore, relational postures of collaboration, transparency, and a “knowing-with” stance (Drewery & McKenzie, 1999; McKenzie, 2004) shaped the co-generation of data. By researching my practice *with* those most affected by it, I followed a narrative research tradition that aims to produce ethical collaborative research (Crocket, 2004a; Crocket, Drewery, McKenzie, Smith, & Winslade, 2004; Gaddis, 2004a; 2004b). A feminist ethics of care (Larrabee, 1993; Lather, 1988; 1991; Oakley, 1999) guided me in all stages of my project—in the generation, selection and analysis of data-texts and in the re-presentation of data that are the results stories. I took care to interpret participants’ words discursively and tried to avoid speaking *about* or *for* the participants. I took care to protect confidentiality and anonymity for clients whose stories were brought to supervision by participants. I discuss these strategies for ethical research practice further in Chapter 4.

It may be argued that unilateral interpretation of data by the researcher might work to undermine the validity and credibility of the research, as well as ethical accountability. However, it has been acknowledged that practices of transparency work to enhance trustworthiness, validity, and accountability in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Indeed, Norman Denzin (2009) suggested that trustworthiness in research is largely measured by the degree and quality of the reflexivity offered. The ethical accountability of this study is supported by the degree and quality of the reflexive processes I have employed in its production. In supervision with my academic supervisors, who were both experienced counselling and supervising practitioners, we reviewed several DVDs of reflective/research conversations. I argue that ethical accountability was increased by making these DVDs of my supervision and research practice available to them. In producing this thesis document, I seek to offer accountability to the research participants and to my professional and academic communities by making my interpretations of data-texts transparent in the results stories. On reflection, richer

theorising of practice might have resulted from widening the chorus of analytic voices. For example, I could have called on the voices of other narrative therapists to assist me in the analysis of data texts.

Before laying out the terrain for the rest of this document, I offer a rationale for the significance of this study for professional supervision, counsellor education and practitioner-research.

### **Rationale for the study**

This study contributes to the field of professional supervision in several ways. First, supervision in general is considered an under-researched area in professional practice (Feltham, 2000; 2004; West, 2006). Sue Wheeler and Kaye Richards (2007) noted a lack of supervision research where supervisors researched their own supervision practice. In many of the studies they reviewed, researchers had investigated the experiences of other supervisors and counsellors.

Second, there is an absence of practitioner action-research, which generates knowledge-in-context (McLeod, 2003). Peggy Sax (2007), a Narrative Therapy practitioner, employed narrative inquiry and participatory-action research methods to research the experiences of health service seekers. While generating knowledge-in-context, Sax was not responsible for providing a professional service to those health seekers. Likewise, Steven Gaddis (2002) used narrative co-inquiry, interpersonal recall processes, and narrative documentation as data material to research the therapeutic experiences of couples in counselling. His research participants were not his clients but family therapists and their clients and he did not weave the researcher and practitioner domains together. Crockett's (2001) study researched the effectiveness of constructionist, narrative approaches to supervision while engaged in peer supervision with a group of counselling practitioners, who were variously informed by the narrative metaphor. Beyond Crockett's study, I found a lack of practitioner-research studies on narrative supervision and with practitioners engaged in supervision with the researcher.

The third way this study contributes to the field of professional supervision is its focus on interdiscursive practice. I use the term interdiscursive to mean supervision which intersects different theoretical discourses. Most supervision



research has investigated supervision from within the same theoretical and therapeutic paradigms (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009). In terms of narrative supervision research, most narrative supervisors have written about their practice with practitioners seeking a narrative approach in supervision (see for example, Behan, 2003a; Fox, Tench, & Marie, 2002; Speedy, 2001). In contrast, this study researches supervision with students and practitioners learning other counselling perspective while engaged in supervision with the researcher. I suggest that this study contributes to both supervision practice when theoretical orientations are non-aligned and to reflexive practitioner-action research.

It is noteworthy that this study could contribute to professional cross-disciplinary discussions. Professional diversity in New Zealand is increasing through the establishment of multidisciplinary teams in health services, government organisations, and community agencies. Crocket's et al. (2009) study on the possibilities and limits of cross-disciplinary supervision highlighted this increasing trend for practitioners working in health and social service organisations in New Zealand to be engaged in supervision outside their practice discipline. My work as a Professional Advisor for Social Work and Counselling in Child Disability Services for Waitemata District Health Board in New Zealand involved facilitating workshops on supervision and providing professional supervision to occupational therapists, physiotherapists, nursing practitioners, and social work family counsellors. As the helping professions continue to work more closely together, cross-disciplinary and cross-theoretical supervision may become a focus for further research.

In summary, this study offers two discrete aspects of supervision that have received little research attention: it researches supervision practice-in-action and it investigates possibilities offered by constructionist, narrative approaches to supervision for practitioners learning humanistic, structural approaches to counselling. As a social constructionist project, research findings generated in this study are "local and particular parcels of knowledge-in-context" (Speedy, 2005b, p.63). Using a poststructuralist, discursive approach to analysis means that "reliability and validity are inappropriate criteria for evaluating research" (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p.28). On these terms, knowledge produced in this study does not

claim generalisability but takes account of its own production and contextual situatedness (Crocket, 2001).

The final task for this chapter is to signpost the direction of the thesis.

## **Mapping the terrain**

**Chapter 2** reviews the relevant counselling supervision literature pertaining to the question of theoretical alignment. It examines the general purposes and processes of supervision, and considers the relationship between professional supervision and counsellor education. It deliberates the advantages, limitations, and ethical dilemmas of non-aligned theoretical orientation in supervision, particularly for student counsellors. Distinctions between mainstream supervision approaches and social constructionist approaches are offered.

**Chapter 3** sets out the theoretical landscapes of Social Constructionism, Feminism, and Poststructuralism which underpin a narrative approach to supervision. It draws relevant distinctions between Liberal Humanism and Postmodernism in the area of identity formation. Discursive positioning as a theoretical tool for examining the work of language is posited. Narrative Therapy is discussed in relation to identity formation and supervision practice.

**Chapter 4** describes the research methodology used in the study. Practitioner-inquiry, feminist critical reflexivity, and narrative co-inquiry are explained. Research design and rationale for data selection, analysis, interpretation, and re-presentation are presented. I introduce the research participants; discuss narrative practices of acknowledgement; and reflect on the politics of re-presentation.

**Chapters 5 to 8** are the results chapters which offer selected episodes from supervision practice. These episodes illustrate moments of discursive dissonance and moments of discursive movement. Each episode is accompanied by a critically reflexive commentary. In the spirit of narrative practice, each chapter tells a particular story that focuses on unique aspects of the participants' professional development. An analysis of these practice stories is discussed at the conclusion of each chapter.

**Chapter 5** illustrates how an explicit request for a narrative focus in supervision gave permission for supervision inquiry to move transparently from transpersonal, psychodynamic discourses towards feminist discourses of solidarity, witnessing, and social justice. The interweaving of personal and professional narratives unsettled discourses of counsellor objectivity and assisted the counsellor to re-author a preferred professional identity. A second episode illustrates a less fluid interdiscursive movement involving an attempt to deconstruct practices of “challenging and confronting” in counselling.

**Chapter 6** examines moments of emotional disturbance and discursive dissonance in a “training” supervision (Carroll, 1996). It illustrates ethical complexities and relational tensions arising when supervision carries assessment responsibilities. In particular, a lack of clarity in the supervision contract produced confusion over expectations and processes of supervision. By offering agentic speaking positions in research meetings, expectations of supervision and differences in theoretical preferences became visible. Consequently, supervision moved closer towards supporting the participant’s preferred practice developments.

**Chapter 7** explores the complexity of integrating deeply held Christian beliefs with professional counselling practice and the implications for supervisor authority. Ethics of hospitality, narrative practices of double listening, re-authoring, outsider-witnessing and appreciative self-witnessing, assisted in sustaining relational responsiveness and practice development. Working for genuine dialogue, I learned ways to promote counsellor and supervisor authority without challenging divine authority.

**Chapter 8** focuses on the interface between the personal and the professional in supervision. Pathologising discourses of self and essentialist constructions of identity sit alongside narrative ideas of an intentional, storying self. Extracts of data-texts illustrate moments of discursive dissonance and subsequent shifts in identity formation. This chapter demonstrates that by storying more preferred personal narratives in supervision, richer accounts of professional identity were storied.

**Chapter 9** discusses the key responses to my research questions and the implications of these responses for supervision and counsellor education. From my interpretations of participants' experiences, I argue that alongside the complexities and difficulties of theoretical non-alignment in supervision, narrative approaches do offer possibilities for enhancing professional identity. I further argue that a socio-political approach to supervision is ethical, responsible practice and that supervision is a form of critical reflexivity for both the practice of a supervisor and a practitioner.

## **Chapter 2: Professional counselling supervision**

The unique position of a trainee embarking on clinical practice makes the work of supervision different, in many respects, from that of supervising the experienced practitioner. The complexity of relationships within the training course, the placement agency where clinical work occurs, and the student him or herself, together with the particular developmental crises and vulnerabilities of the trainee, and the presence of assessment of the trainee's skills all call for a particular clarity in establishing the limits of responsibility and agreeing explicit contracts. (Izzard, 2001, p.75)

### **Introduction**

The work of this chapter is to review the supervision literature most relevant to the question of theoretical alignment in supervision and to identify gaps in the literature which might have assisted me with my practice dilemmas. I start with an explanation of supervision and then explore the relationship between supervision and counselling education. I next consider developmental, integrative, and social constructionist approaches to supervision in relation to theoretical alignment. A discussion of narrative approaches to supervision follows in the next chapter for, in order to fully represent a narrative supervision, I need to describe in more detail the theoretical landscapes on which narrative practice is located. I now turn to the site of my research inquiry, professional counselling supervision.

### **Professional supervision**

Within helping professions such as psychology, psychotherapy, social work, nursing and counselling, supervision is valued as a measure of public accountability, as a sign of professionalism, and as a support for competent and ethical practice (see for example, Beddoe & Worrall, 2004; Bond & Holland, 1998; Carroll, 1996; Hawkins & Shohet, 2006; Inskipp & Proctor, 1995; Lawton & Feltham, 2000; McMahon & Patton, 2002; Morrison, 2001; Proctor, 1994). For the NZAC, supervision is for “counsellors to reflect on and develop effective and ethical practice” (p.33). Supervision is considered both a process and a product: “Supervision is a process between two practitioners involving regular, protected time for facilitated, in-depth reflection of clinical practice, the purpose of which is

to achieve, sustain and creatively develop quality of service” (Bond & Holland, 1998, p.1). The supervisory relationship has been described as a “working alliance” and a collaborative partnership designed to “enable the counsellor to gain in ethical competence, confidence and creativity so as to give her best possible service to her clients” (Inskipp & Proctor, 1995, p.1).

However, while there appears general agreement on the purpose of supervision, the outcomes of supervision—assumed improved service for clients—would appear less assured. Whilst highly valued in the counselling profession, supervision may not be achieving all the tasks we entrust it to do. There is a lack of agreement about those tasks, and how to achieve them, as witnessed in the various approaches to supervision offered in the literature. For example, Wheeler and Richards’s (2007) systematic review of supervision literature in the United Kingdom (UK), found little evidence that supervision ensured improved quality of service or accountability. Although these authors found that supervision offered opportunities for counsellors to improve their practice and gain confidence, they also suggested that “it was speculation that this transferred to improved client outcome” (p.63). Previously, Colin Feltham (2000) had called for more empirical research on the efficacy of supervision for clients and cautioned against uncritical regard of supervision itself. I agree with Feltham’s suggestion that the profession of counselling needs to be cautious that supervision does not become a practice of vigilance or individual surveillance. In the results chapters, I show how participants readily brought to supervision stories of themselves as in-error or in-deficit.

In the following section, I consider the relationship between counsellor education and supervision, and the responsibilities of what Michael Carroll (1996) referred to as “a training supervision”.

## **Supervision and counsellor education**

Counsellor education programmes look to professional supervision as an integral part of a student’s development in becoming a professional counsellor. However, the relationship between counsellor education and supervision requires careful negotiation. The three main components of counselling education as outlined in the NZAC Code of Ethics are: “the development of counsellor self-awareness and

self-understanding; the acquisition of counselling knowledge and skills; and supervised practice of counselling” (2002, p.46). These three components align with and also differ from Michael Rønnestad and Tom Skovholt’s (2001) tripartite model of counsellor training, that is, personal therapy, coursework and supervised practice. The borderlines between these three areas of counsellor education are not as fixed as one might assume from the literature. In practice, boundaries between supervised practice, acquisition of professional knowledge and skills, and the development of self-knowledge are permeable. For example, students in supervision have asked me for assistance with coursework and were unsure if they could talk about personal experiences in supervision, even when aspects of their personal experience directly involved their professional practice. Francesca Inskipp and Bridget Proctor’s (1994, 1995) normative, formative and restorative model of supervision responds to the need for integration of personal, organisational and professional domains in supervision. Even so, there is still confusion over personal/professional, practice/theory boundaries.

In my experience, some student counsellors have received little guidance from their training providers about supervision. Proctor (1994) argued that the task of preparing student counsellors and new practitioners for supervision must be shared by training providers as well as supervisors: she considered it was unreasonable to assign this task to supervisors alone. I share her view that responsibility for the preparation for supervision be shared among those involved with a student counsellor.

## **Responsibilities in supervision**

In providing supervision for practitioners, I am guided by the NZAC Code of Ethics for supervision:

Counsellors shall be responsible for selecting and taking to supervision relevant aspects of their work and their personal functioning...

Supervisors shall be responsible for assisting counsellors to explore and address their professional practice, and helping counsellors to monitor their competence, safety and fitness to practice. (NZAC, 2002, p.33)

As supervisor, I consider my task is to *assist* practitioners to explore and reflect on their practice and to *help* them monitor their practice. The responsibility for selecting which aspects of their practice to bring to supervision remains with practitioners. The complexity of relationships between training providers, placement agencies, student practitioners and supervisors, informs supervision with students differently from supervision with experienced practitioners. As noted by Susannah Izzard (2001): “it is all too easy for clinical responsibility to fall into the hole between the supervisor, training course and placement agency” (p.77). With student counsellors, matters of responsibility can be confusing and need to be worked out between training provider, placement agency, student and supervisor. Carroll (1996) recommended that supervisors work out in advance their “responsibilities vis-à-vis training courses and counselling agencies” (p.92). In Chapter 5, I show how a lack of clarity over expectations and responsibilities of supervision caused misunderstanding and confusion for a student counsellor.

Ambiguity and confusion in a training supervision over responsibility for client practice were also noted in Crocket’s (2004a) study of responsibility in counselling supervision in New Zealand. While some supervisors expressed concern about how they were positioned in terms of responsibility for students’ practice, other supervisors noted how supervising students significantly contributed to their own professional development. Without diminishing the complexity of working with students in supervision, suggestions were made in Crocket’s study about the potential for reciprocity and mutual learning when boundaries are less fixed. The history of the strong influence of developmental models in supervision since the 1980s tends to obscure the possibility of collaborative partnerships where supervisors can learn from practitioners in supervision. I now consider how developmental approaches to supervision addressed my practice dilemmas.

## **Developmental approaches to supervision**

Supervision shaped by developmental discourse emphasises a generalised hierarchy of development, and focuses on the needs of students and practitioners at different stages of their learning. Developmental approaches tend to offer instruction, modelling, and structure, particularly in the early stages of training



(McNeill, Stoltenberg, & Romans, 1992; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 1993; 2001; 2003). For example, Cal Stoltenberg (2005) considered that his Integrated Developmental Model provided a useful framework for understanding how “supervisees change over time and how various supervision environments (broadly) and supervision interventions (specifically) can enhance or detract from the development of professional competencies” (p.857). Distinguishing between supervision with beginning and advanced students, Rønnestad and Skovholt (1993) claimed that overemphasis on the evaluative aspects of supervision might foster defensiveness in the student. They suggested that students might excessively screen clients brought to supervision and resist dealing with “delicate weaknesses or difficulties” (p.400). Those authors claimed that although tensions in supervision are different with advanced students they are no less significant: “Tension at the advanced student stage, where the student vacillates between feeling confident and professionally insecure, cannot be emphasized too much” (p.400). Their stance is an important one for this study as both student counsellors and newly qualified counsellors participated.

Similarly, in their review of developmental research in the United States (US), Rodney Goodyear and Janine Bernard (1998) suggested that students’ expectations for supervision corresponded with their level of training: “...beginning trainees express the need for greater amounts of support, structure, and encouragement, whereas advanced trainees have more interest in focussing on personal issues that affect their work and on higher order skills” (p.11). Goodyear and Bernard’s views are supported by Val Wosket (2000) in the UK, who stated that in supervision with experienced practitioners: “Rarely...do we discuss counselling strategies, specific therapeutic interventions or treatment plans” (p.206). Instead, Wosket found herself talking about personal issues and significant life changes, and their impact on therapeutic work.

However, while relevant to my practice, I am wary of developmental approaches to supervision that offer guidance based on generalised theories of life development. Susan Hawes (1998), a feminist supervisor, claimed that power relationships in much traditional supervision tend to position a supervisor as an “expert” and a student practitioner as a “humble novice” (p.96). Similarly, Sue

Cornforth and Lisa Clairborne (2008) noted that in their experience of tertiary educational supervision, developmental ideas “tend to re-create a dualism of expert practitioner and grateful apprentice” (p.607). I prefer to establish collaborative working partnerships with both experienced and student counsellors in supervision while holding my responsibilities as supervisor.

### **Integrative approaches to supervision**

Other approaches to supervision claim to have addressed the problem of theoretical alignment in supervision by offering generic and integrative models. Elizabeth Holloway and Michael Carroll (1999) offer two such examples. Through integrating developmental and educational aspects of supervision, Holloway and Carroll claim their approach focuses on similarities of supervision such as tasks, purposes, and functions, rather than emphasising philosophical and practice differences. Carroll (1996) claimed his generic approach was compatible with developmental models of supervision, for it allowed for changing interventions and strategies “according to the developmental needs of the supervisee” (p.44). He considered supervision was mainly an educative process with seven primary tasks: teaching, instructing, demonstrating, lecturing, coaching, monitoring, and evaluating. He maintained that an educative, integrative model connected the goals and purposes of supervision to the functions, tasks, and roles of supervision. Carroll regarded his supervision model as atheoretical and therefore applicable “across counselling orientations” (p.44).

In addition to Carroll’s integrative approach, Holloway’s (1995) systemic approach to supervision also included similar supervisory tasks of “monitoring, instructing, modelling, supporting and consulting” (p.59). Holloway developed a twenty-five box matrix, matching the tasks of supervision with counsellor competency in counselling skills, case conceptualisation, professional role, emotional awareness, and evaluation. Both Carroll and Holloway (1999) posited that their educative, integrative, and systemic approaches to supervision took into account levels of student competence and confidence at various stages of their learning and was not counselling-bound, that is, their model of supervision was not closely allied to the counselling orientation of the supervisor.

Their claims however, did not address my particular practice dilemmas.

Furthermore, these integrative approaches do not satisfy the question of non-aligned theoretical supervision for other supervisors as well. Integrative supervision approaches, while claiming expansiveness and universal application tend to ignore their own “paradigm-locatedness” (Crocket, 2001, p.6). That is, when we put any model into practice, inherent in the practice are particular philosophical assumptions. The question of theoretical “fit” (Feltham, 2000, p.8) in supervision is a further way in which the central questions of this study have been addressed in the literature.

### **Theoretical alignment in supervision**

Historically, because the practice of supervision has closely mirrored the prevailing therapeutic models of the time, little attention has been paid to the underlying epistemologies of supervision practice. Yet, as argued by Crocket (2004b; 2004c), supervision is talking about what we take to be true about the world whether those “truths” are visible on the surface of our conversations or hidden in the subtexts. Holloway (1995) claimed that in her systemic approach “the relationship is the core factor and contains the process of the supervision interaction” (p.7). The professional “truth claim” that the supervisory relationship is the core factor of supervision mirrors the same “truth claim” that the client/therapist relationship is the core factor for change in a client-centred approach to counselling (Mearns & Thorne, 2007). Shaping most supervision approaches are the same humanistic, client-centred psychologies which shape traditional approaches to counselling (see historical reviews in Bernard, 2005; Bernard & Goodyear, 2009).

This is hardly surprising, for, as Feltham (2000) noted, since psychoanalysis and its emphasis on the therapeutic relationship is the oldest of therapeutic orientations, the counselling profession as a whole has taken much of its supervision template from it:

In Britain, the psychodynamic and Person-Centred schools arguably still predominate and accordingly great emphasis placed within supervision on the supervisory relationship, parallel process, core (relationship) conditions and on transference and countertransference foci. (p.8)

Despite the growth of social constructionist therapies (Hoyt, 1998; Lock & Strong, 2010; Lowe, 2004), collaborative therapies (Anderson & Gehart, 2007; Paré & Lerner, 2004), and Narrative Therapy (White & Epston, 1990; White, 2007), and growth in cognitive behavioural therapies (Rothbaum, Meadows, & Resick, 2000), supervision remains firmly located in transference discourse. Proctor's (1994) historical assumption: "...most counsellors belong to a counselling sect that is broadly humanistic, with firm person-centred underpinnings (and, perhaps less obviously, a loose 'systems' framework)" (p.310), is arguably still relevant for today. I would surmise that in New Zealand, as in the UK (Feltham, 2000), psychodynamic, transactional and Person-Centred therapy remain the most popular therapeutic approaches. Therefore, it is not unreasonable that counsellors trained in traditional approaches to therapy, expect to focus on issues of "transference" and "countertransference" in supervision. From this theoretical perspective, a supervisor's task is to make the transpersonal dynamics in the supervisory relationship visible and available for the benefit of the counsellor's relationship with her client (Symons, 2008).

In practising from a social constructionist, narrative approach, I appear out of step with the transference discourse in mainstream supervision literature. This raises ethical issues for me about theoretical alignment. Feltham and Dryden (1994) suggested that supervision be "reasonably congruent with supervisees' own theoretical orientations" (p.18). Proctor (1994) suggested that theoretical non-alignment in supervision would restrict lively discussion and it would be difficult to "contend vigorously and fruitfully when there are real and important disagreements over counselling orientations" (p.309). Earlier research also claimed that perceived theoretical similarity enhanced effectiveness of supervision (Putney, Worthington Jr., & McCullough, 1992). If this is so for qualified counselling practitioners, what does the literature say about theoretical alignment for students in supervision?

### **Theoretical alignment in supervision with students**

As noted by Izzard (2001) on page 20, supervision with student counsellors is more complex than supervision with experienced practitioners for several reasons. The complexity of relationships, expectations and responsibilities between course

work, practice placement, personal therapy and supervision means that theoretical non-alignment may be an unnecessary complication for a student counsellor. Feltham (2000) noted that in the UK, the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) “stresses the wisdom of trainees especially, receiving supervision from supervisors who share or are comfortable with the same theoretical orientation” (p.8). Although cautioning against “unhelpful mismatches” for student practitioners, Feltham and Dryden (1994) did not elucidate what might constitute an unhelpful mismatch, only that “person-centred trainees and beginning counsellors should ideally have person-centred supervisors” (p.18). Thus, it would seem that Feltham and Dryden supported theoretical alignment for students and beginning counsellors.

However, those authors also suggested that a shared theoretical alignment in supervision might prevent a supervisor noticing or challenging limitations of a counsellor’s orientation because they were both viewing counselling through the same theoretical lens. They proposed supervisors “may be quite unlikely to look for and challenge the limitations of your [the counsellor’s] orientation” (p.18). Further to his earlier position, Feltham (2000) later raised pertinent questions about the effects of theoretical alignment in supervision when he wrote “the continual growth of constructionist therapies forces us to reconsider the question of supervisor-supervisee fit in relation to theoretical allegiance” (p.8). He suggested that if theoretical orientations of supervisors and counsellors were too closely matching, they (supervisor and counsellor) may find themselves in “theoretical or clinical collusion” (p.8). Thus, supervision has the potential to reinforce theoretical traditions at the expense of client welfare by viewing the client’s world from the same theoretical perspective. Feltham speculated if supervisors should be asking themselves if their “preferred clinical approach has limited competency which the client should be alerted to” (p.9).

So, on the one hand, it has been suggested that congruence in theoretical orientation and confidence in the supervisory relationship are the two most important factors for supervision to have an impact on counsellors’ practice (Vallance, 2005). On the other, it has been suggested that sharing the same worldview may not necessarily generate new practice possibilities (Feltham,

2000). Moreover, Proctor (1994) claimed that it was poor supervision practice to avoid contention or challenging issues and to not “move a counsellor beyond what they already know” (p.310).

It seems from my reading of the relevant supervision literature that the question of theoretical alignment in supervision is not easily answered. The literature suggests that student counsellors may need theoretical alignment while more experienced counsellors may benefit from theoretical non-alignment in supervision. However, there was little guidance for supervisors, like myself, engaging in an interdiscursive supervision practice.

Perhaps theoretical orientation is not the whole story. Indeed, Nicola Gazzola and Ann Theriault (2007) found that inflexibility on the part of the supervisor, particularly in regards to theoretical orientation, produced a “narrowing effect” for students. Some of the students in their study felt “coerced to squeeze into the theoretical mould of the supervisor, and felt pressure to conform and emulate the supervisor” (p.195). Their study suggests to me that it is not only theoretical non-alignment that may be problematic but also the discursive flexibility of the supervisor. How a supervisor listens, responds, and works with theoretical difference in supervision effects students’ learning. My preference is to expand rather than narrow professional development and to work for the generation of knowledge through collaborative, conversational partnerships with students.

The notion of collaborative partnerships brings me to consider the supervisory relationship. The supervisory relationship in social constructionist approaches to supervision is understood differently from traditional transferential counselling approaches. Less emphasis is placed on theoretical orientation and more emphasis is given to how knowledge is produced relationally. I now move to consider how the social constructionist literature addressed my practice dilemmas.

### **Social constructionist approaches to supervision**

In their overview of supervision texts, Bernard and Goodyear (2009) proposed that social constructionist approaches to supervision have challenged mainstream supervision approaches. They speculated that a constructionist paradigm encouraged practitioners, supervisors, and researchers to consider more varied

ways by which counselling experience can be understood. However, while acknowledging the growth of social constructionist therapies, these authors do not specifically address the question of theoretical alignment between constructionist supervision and traditional counselling approaches. Furthermore, social constructionist literature does not offer a consensus in the matter of theoretical alignment in supervision.

Instead, a social constructionist approach to supervision offers two useful considerations for my study. As I have already discussed, traditional supervision transports the centrality of the therapeutic relationship into the supervisory relationship as the core condition for change. Such an approach emphasises relational postures of empathy, non-judgement, warmth, and unconditional regard and acceptance (Rogers, 1962, 1980). Roger Lowe (2000) suggested that in social constructionist supervision the emphasis is not on the supervisory relationship; rather, the intention “is to provide flexible guidelines that can accommodate a range of supervisory activities” (p.511). Therefore, it can be said that transferential discourses are not central to a social constructionist approach to supervision.

Another useful consideration offered by a social constructionist approach is how developmental discourse is understood. For example, there is less differentiation between supervision with an experienced practitioner and a student practitioner. Indeed, a social constructionist supervisor “seeks to introduce significant aspects of consultative supervision from the beginning” (Lowe, 2000, p.514). Lowe theorised that a supervisor and a student will have shifted their relationship to a consultative one much earlier than graduation. From a social constructionist perspective, the educative foci of integrative models of supervision, although potentially useful, are seen to privilege the expertise of the supervisor (Philp, Guy, & Lowe, 2007).

Although a social constructionist approach to supervision makes less distinction between student practitioners and qualified practitioners than developmental or integrative models and places less emphasis on the supervisory relationship, the question of theoretical alignment is still not easily answered. For example, Lowe (2000) considered supervisors are likely to be more congruent and effective

“when working from the same therapeutic stance in supervision as they do in therapy” (p.512). He claimed there was less confusion or ambiguity for students when similar patterns were replicated at different levels of a system, rather than students having to learn different patterns in different systems. Similarly, Chris Behan (2003a) a social constructionist and narrative practitioner, suggested that approaches to supervision which were internally consistent with the paradigm in which we think about therapy are more helpful: “Ideally, sticking to one worldview gives practitioners a frame of intelligibility, a way to make sense of all the information coming at them” (p.30).

From a social constructionist perspective, theoretical alignment is not considered problematic because all counselling models are considered potentially useful. Supervision *as* social construction, focuses on *how* counsellors talk about their work rather than the particular model of practice they use or the specific content they bring to supervision (McNamee & Shawver, 2004). However, in supervision I listen for the counselling knowledges, tacit or explicit, being called upon in accounts of practice as well as *how* practitioners talk about their practice. In a similar vein to Philp et al., (2007) discursive tensions surface for me when practitioners try to “uncover the ‘truth’ about clients” or try to find “expert prescriptions for client change” (p.53). My focus at these discursive intersections is on how I might respond in ways that generate new possibilities for a counsellor’s practice, without agreeing with assumed truth claims.

Overall, I found a lack of consensus as to the position of theoretical alignment in supervision. Moreover, I agree with Speedy (2000), who found a lack of “uncertainty and timidity” (p.428) in traditional supervision literature. Developmental and transferential, integrative approaches to supervision are located in the same certain approaches to counselling and did not satisfy my interdiscursive supervision dilemmas. Furthermore, the absence of an analysis of power relations in traditional supervision approaches does not satisfy my requirement for a critically reflexive posture. My preference in responding to an interdiscursive supervision practice is to take a more exploratory approach to the question of theoretical non-aligned and to call on narrative practices of co-inquiry, critical reflexivity, tools of deconstruction and discursive positioning.



## **The work of this chapter**

This chapter reviewed the supervision literature relevant to my study, namely, theoretical alignment and drew connections between professional supervision and counsellor education. It noted the historical influence of developmental, educative, and integrative approaches to supervision. It drew attention to the lack of critical discussion in the literature around issues of theoretical alignment. Although theoretical congruence seemed preferable for students, there is an absence of a clear agreement in the literature. The next chapter will explore the theoretical landscapes which underpin Narrative Therapy and the poststructural concepts of discourse, power, discursive positioning, deconstruction, authorship and agency which shape narrative approaches to supervision.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical landscapes of this study**

### **Introduction**

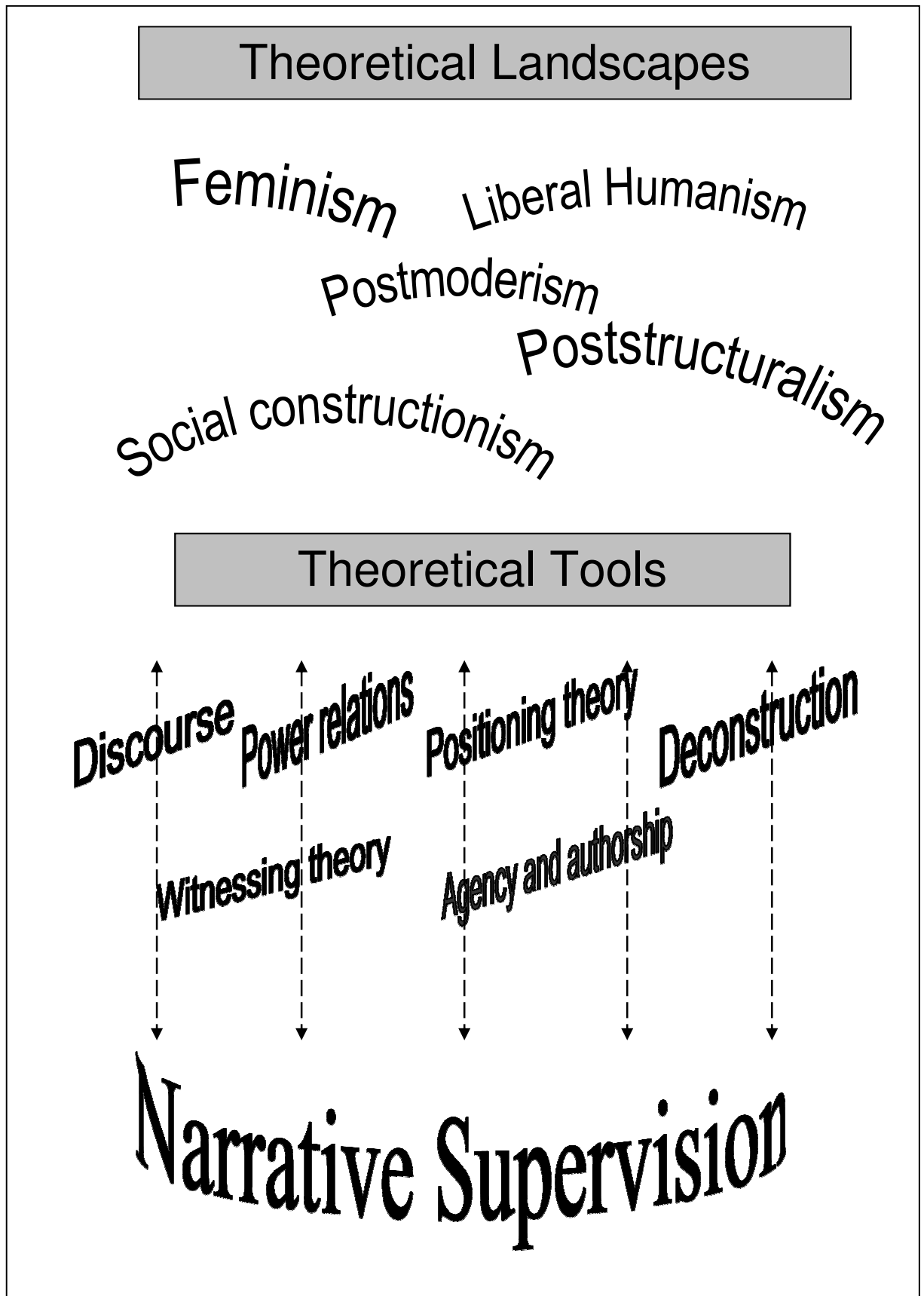
This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I consider aspects of Postmodernism, Liberal Humanism, Feminism, and Social Constructionism relevant to my research inquiry. My purpose in drawing distinctions between humanist and social constructionist paradigms is to illustrate the discursive disturbances that produced my practice dilemmas. I seek to locate my practice dilemmas as discursive productions and not as relational or individual productions. It is the effects of discourse and the politics of professional relationships that I wish to explore in this study. In the second section, I examine poststructural concepts of discourse and power, theoretical tools of deconstruction and positioning theory, and concepts of authorship and agency. In the third section, I describe Narrative Therapy and interweave the above theoretical ideas with narrative approaches to supervision. **Figure 1** on page 34 sets out the broad theoretical landscapes and the theoretical tools described in this chapter.

### **Section 1: Theories of Practice**

#### **Postmodernism**

This study is situated among those postmodern qualitative approaches to research, which are part of the move in social sciences away from “grand truth narratives” (Lyotard, 1984) and toward studies that focus on local and contextual knowledges. Postmodernism, as described by Jean-François Lyotard (1984) is a posture of incredulity towards meta-narratives of legitimation. Shotter (1993) added a rider to Lyotard’s claim, suggesting that that we should be “not only incredulous towards grand narratives, but also suspicious of all stories, even little ones” (p. xxiv). In other words, there is not one objective truth, or foundation, against which other forms of knowledge are measured. Postmodernism, as a response to modernism, does not designate a systematic theory, privilege any single authority, method or paradigm, and does not offer a coherent school of thought or comprehensive philosophy.

Figure 1: Theoretical landscapes of this study



Although Postmodernism does not offer a meta-theoretical analysis of power, it does propose that generalised, universal truths about the human condition are socially constructed (Burr, 2003). A postmodern approach to therapy unsettles authority, disrupts stable truths, offers multiple and competing narratives, and as Kaethe Weingarten (1998) asserted, privileges “the small and the ordinary” in therapeutic practice. This means that knowledge production, what is held to be true, is contingent and contextual to time and place (Burr, 2003). In comparison, Liberal Humanism proposes that universal human values are applicable across gender, culture and human experience.

## **Liberal Humanism**

There is much to be valued in humanism. Human rights movements throughout the world have inspired protests against dictatorial regimes, genocide, cruelty, gender and sexual discrimination, and fuelled global philanthropic movements. My argument in this study is not to discount these noble intentions and philosophies. What I draw attention to are the negative effects of a Western culture that places great value on persons as individual, autonomous, and self-sufficient. In the helping professions, the effects of a culture where the subject is supposedly self-responsible and self-fulfilled, produces not only capacities, rights and privileges but also exclusion, inequalities, and divisions (Rose, 1998). As argued by Nikolas Rose (1998) and Edward Sampson (Sampson, 1989a, 1989b, 1993), Western humanist ideals of autonomy, individualism, and independence shape much of mainstream psychological practice. Modern psychology in turn has measured the human subject on masculinist ideals of success and aspiration. Gendered individualism ignores the effects of familial and social living and excludes a large proportion of the world’s population.

## **Humanist understandings of identity**

As discussed in the previous chapter, psychotherapy originated from a Freudian psychology of the unconscious. On Freudian terms, much of the self was considered deeply hidden and this idea gave rise to practices of speculation, hypothesising and interpretation on the part of a therapist: in order to understand human behaviour we need to first understand the reasons behind a person’s actions. A discourse of the unconscious can encourage therapists to try to “discover the truth of the matter”; the hidden cause behind the problem. Language,

as I discuss later in this chapter, calls us into particular positions of power within particular discourses. In supervision, when I hear terms such as “introverted”, “neurotic”, or “narcissistic” used to describe clients, I feel I am being called to take a position of certainty about that person’s character or personality. My preference is for a position of contingency—a *knowing-with* rather than a *knowing-about* posture. Clifford Geertz’s (1986) words resonate with me: “Whatever sense we have of how things stand with someone else’s inner life, we gain it through their expressions, not through some magical intrusion into their consciousness” (p.373). A humanist subject as an internal, unconscious, fixed self, obscures the rich relational, social and historical developments in a person’s life (White, 1995a). The idea that an essentialist individual self is something that “belongs to the person in question and has nothing to do with the social world” (Lawler, 2008, p.5), in my view, limits possibilities for living and identity development. As practitioners, we do not only describe the people we work with: we interpret their lives, personalities and problems. The ideas which shape our interpretations are crucial to how we then engage with people in our professional practice. In supervision, as I listen to practitioners describe their clients and the problems they bring to counselling, I am interested also in how clients might explain their situation: the words they might use to tell their story.

Traditional Western social and cultural ideas of human nature have influenced counselling practice worldwide. Traditional forms of counselling in Aotearoa New Zealand have been challenged by Māori, indigenous tangata whenua.<sup>5</sup> Maori practitioners protested that Western individualistic, humanist understandings of autonomy, independence and self-responsibility did not fit their cultural, collective understandings of family and kinship (Durie, 1989, 1999, 2004). It is beyond the scope of this study to examine these indigenous challenges for counselling and supervision in New Zealand. I encourage readers to review the work of Alastair Crocket (2010) on counselling in postcolonial times and Averill Waters’ (2008) work as a school counsellor bridging the gap between home and school for Tongan students.

Even when belonging to the dominant culture, hegemonic views of identity place

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<sup>5</sup>Tangata whenua is a Māori term for “people of the land”.

great pressure on people to measure up to idealised social norms and expectations. Who we are, in social and cultural terms, allows and disallows our participation in, and our experience of, particular social worlds (Gergen, 1991). In my experience, ideas of self-actualisation, self-fulfilment and self-improvement invite people to spend many years in therapy trying to “find themselves”. Ideas such as “building up our self-esteem, getting our needs met, developing more assertiveness” are ideas freely available in social and professional contexts (Winslade, Crocket, & Smith, 1999). In my practice, I work to expose the systems of power inherent in everyday cultural practices (Shotter, 1993), and ask “who might I become”, or who am I outside the problems I bring to therapy (Lowe, 2004). My actions are based on my politics which are located in social constructionist, narrative theoretical landscapes, and on a feminist analysis of power which I now discuss.

## **Feminism**

It is not my intention to fully explore all aspects of feminism in this discussion. I like the definition offered by Cecilia Kitzinger (2000) that feminism is a social movement dedicated to political change and the ending of heteropatriarchal domination. Working in social services and women’s health in the early 1980s, I viewed my practice through a feminist lens and moved away from traditional psychological approaches that were primarily concerned with the individual subject. I became more interested in working with families and thinking in terms of broader social and cultural discourses. During this time, feminist therapists in Australia, NZ and the US, drew attention to unexamined gendered discourses in the practice, supervision and training of family therapists (see for example, Beecher, 1983; Goldner, 1988; Hare-Mustin, 1978, 1983; James, 1984; James & McIntyre, 1989; MacKinnon & Miller, 1985; Pilalis & Anderton, 1986; Walters, Carter, Papp, & Silverstein, 1988; Weingarten, 1991). At the same time, feminist academics were challenging traditional constructions of gender (Drewery, 1986; Henriques, Holloway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984; Spender, 1982, 1985; Weedon, 1987). Feminist deconstruction of gender in family therapy not only challenged patriarchal privilege in structural (Minuchin, 1974), strategic (Madanes, 1981), and systemic models (Selvini Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, & Prata, 1978; 1980), but also made visible the discursive, gendered position of

therapists themselves.

I emphasise this huge contribution feminist thought has made to professional practice. I was impressed by the inclusion of a feminist analysis into a narrative approach to family therapy and I went to Adelaide, South Australia in the 1980s to study with Michael White at the Dulwich Centre. Feminism's contribution to family therapy was acknowledged by White (2001) when he wrote:

Feminism has been perhaps the most extraordinary social achievement of the last few decades, and I think its influence within family therapy has been enormous. I believe that it has contributed to a sea-change, many of the implications of which are still being worked out. I know that there has been a backlash to feminist ideas, but, despite this, the ripples are ever widening. Feminism has changed, and is continuing to change, so much of what we think and what we do. (p.133)

Feminism is not the only lens for analysing differences of power in the world. For some practitioners, looking through a lens of culture (Waldegrave, 1990; 2009) or ethnicity (hooks, 1997), or sexuality (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995) provides a way of analysing inequalities in relationships and communities. Even so, I agree with the opinions expressed by the anonymous writer in Shona Russell and Maggie Cary's (2003) article when she wrote: "For me...the first thing that I notice is gender. Feminism is the lens, which I then try to use to understand other relations of power and my responsibilities in relation to them" (p.79).

Feminist theory challenges the hegemonic, heteropatriarchal view of knowledge for "at the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge" (Spender, 1985, p.5). Knowledge from a feminist perspective is not unbiased, objective or innocent but produced by systems of power, culturally and socially located through time. Feminist theories of knowledge production conjoin with Social Constructionism which is another major, theoretical landscape underpinning this study.

## **Social Constructionism**

As with feminism, to offer a definition of social constructionism is not straightforward because there is no one feature, which could be said to identify a social constructionist position. Instead, Burr (2003, pp.3-5) offered four major understandings that are commonly accepted as representing social constructionist ideas. First, a critical stance is taken towards taken-for-granted knowledge. Second, we make sense of the world, including ourselves, through specific historical and cultural viewpoints. Third, our knowledge of the world comes from our social interactions. Fourth, different constructions of reality produce different outcomes and actions.

Social constructionism challenges the idea that conventional knowledge is based on unbiased objectivity and insists that we question what we take to be true. In the field of psychology, social constructionism opposes the essentialist subject on the basis that essentialism has the potential to trap persons inside personalities or identities that are limiting for them and which are then further pathologised by psychology (Burr, 2003). A social constructionist orientation resists the idea that it is possible to demarcate the subject from the social contexts and practices through which subjects are constituted (Stephenson, 2001). Thus, social constructionism as a theoretical orientation for counselling, views persons as constituted subjects through particular social, contextual, gendered, economic, historical and political discourses. This position stands in contrast to the humanistic idea that there is an essentialist self that can be discovered through insight (Rogers, 1980). These two divergent conceptualisations of subjectivity produce the major discursive dissonance in my supervision practice. How knowledge is produced is a key focus of my practice and this study.

To support my practice and this study, I call on the work of those theorists who are interested in the relational, dialogical production of knowledge, including Mikhail Bakhtin (1981; 1984; 1986), John Shotter (1993; 1994; 1997; 2005; 2007), and Kenneth Gergen (1985, 1999; 2004; Gergen & McNamee, 1992). The concept that knowledge is considered a process of intersubjective or intertextual knowing and is a relational production, comes from the dialogic emphasis Bakhtin, among others, placed on the production of knowledge: “Truth is not born nor is it to be found



inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between persons* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (1984, p.110, italics in original). Underlying my supervision practice and this study is a notion that “knowledge is something that persons *do* together and not something you either have or do not have” (Burr, 2003, p.9).

From a dialogic perspective, our words have no meaning in themselves: meaning is produced in relation to a “corridor of voices”, other utterances in a long history of utterances (Bakhtin, 1986, p.293). Our utterances are not our own but a link in a chain to some other utterance that has gone before and spoke in anticipation of future utterances. Therefore, speaking is dynamic, relational, and referenced to others’ speaking. Shotter (2007) suggested that common assumptions and meanings are arrived at within different language communities through “joint dialogic action”. He described his stance to relational collaborative meaning-making as “witness-thinking” referring to the ethics of acknowledgement, respect and a “collective-we” approach to conversation.

[I]f I sense you as not being sensitive in that way, that is, as not being responsive to me, but as pursuing an agenda of your own, then I will feel immediately offended in an ethical way. I will feel that you lack respect not only for our affairs, but for me too. In such circumstances, not only do I feel insulted, but I lack the social conditions necessary to express myself, the nature of my own inner life. (2005, p.103)

Creating the social conditions in supervision for practitioners to express themselves, to speak to what is of value and importance to them, are outcomes I strive for. The poststructural tools of discourse, power, positioning theory and agency support me in this endeavour. I move now to discuss these poststructural concepts which shape my supervision practice and form another theoretical base for this study.

## Section 2: Theoretical Tools

### Discourse

Central to an understanding of narrative practice are the concepts of discourse and power. It is difficult to talk about discourse without also discussing power because on Foucauldian terms, these two concepts are inextricably connected. Foucault (1972) described discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p.49). On these terms, discourse is a systematic coherent set of images, or metaphors, or ways of speaking that constructs or represents an object in a particular way (Burr, 1998). Thus, discourse is both an object that is produced and a process in which we engage. Discourse is something that we *do*, for as we speak, we call into existence the objects we are talking about and we do so through particular social and linguistic practices which create particular meanings (Willig, 1999). In counselling and supervision, we actively create and exchange pieces of discourse in the moment of making an utterance (Winslade, 2005). In supervision, as we talk about professional practice, we are creating a story of our practice: a story that is fluid, contextual and contingent, and shaped by the responses of the listener. How practice stories and stories of identity are shaped in supervision conversations are matters of power.

Discourses shape our lives and identities but they also obscure their own means of production. Common professional truth claims used to describe people seeking therapy, for example, “narcissistic, manipulative, or borderline personality”, are identity conclusions that are split off from the conditions and context of their production (White, 1991). Later in this section, I show how a deconstructive inquiry works to make these underlying assumptions visible. Discourses are words and meanings that do not only describe reality: they bring that reality into existence. As we talk, “the phenomena” that is talked about is “brought into sight” (Parker, 1991, p.4). Because not all social and linguistic practices are equal, dominant systems of meanings and commonly accepted language-in-use allow particular knowledges and realities into existence and exclude or marginalise others (Willig, 2001). In counselling or supervision conversations, *who* brings *what* into sight, or calls into existence particular phenomena and not others, are matters of power. As supervisor, I work to offer space for practitioners to be co-constructors on the meanings produced in supervision. How I position myself, and how I make

speaking positions available for others in supervision, are matters of power.

## **Power**

On Foucauldian terms, power is not something a person has or does not have—a commodity to be given away or taken back. Power works together with knowledge in a capillary, nomadic and circulating manner at every level of human interaction and is a “complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1978, p.93). Power in the particular society of supervision is exercised through access to speaking positions in the supervision talk. Foucault (1984) theorised that it was not power that was to be seized, but access to discourse.

Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized” (p.110)

From a poststructuralist perspective, it is discourse that produces relations of power; it is discourse that produces “effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums” (Foucault, 1978, p.94). Foucault argued that inequalities and divisions in social living were produced through discursive power and not through persons’ individual failures. For example, power might be expressed through divisions between persons, on terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, and religion or through the control of the meanings that govern the life of a person or of a community (Winslade, 2009). These divisions cause inequalities, inclusion, exclusion, privilege and domination. Poststructural theory argues that people are never totally powerless but exercise degrees of power according to the discourses and speaking positions available to them.

If discourse is basically political and is made from many voices competing for space (Bakhtin, 1981), then a poststructural narrative practitioner understands power as having space in discourse. In this view, power operates as relations of power. It is the relations of power that I seek to pay attention to in my counselling and supervision practice. As I illustrate in the forthcoming results stories, power is a fluid, transitory process producing changing relations between me and the research participants. I now discuss discursive positioning theory which examines how persons accept, reject, or subvert position calls.

## **Positioning theory, agency and position calls**

Originating from a Foucauldian concern for how we are produced as subjects, positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990; 1999; Harré & van Langenhøve, 1991) has become a tool to enrich professional practice. Positioning theory has been taken up by narrative practitioners because it shows how discursive shifts are accepted, refused or subverted in particular moments of speaking (Drewery, 2005; Winslade, 2005). In the context of supervision, Crocket (2001) described the concept of positioning as “a place to which we are called, in relation, within a set of social rules, practices, power relations and ways of speaking” (p.10). If identity is constituted through language, then it is through language that we are called into relation with others as particular types of subjects (Drewery, 2005).

Positioning theory argues that we take up positions in relation to each other the moment we speak. We exercise power by recognising the position calls being offered to us and by deciding to accept, resist, or subvert those discourses which constitute us as particular kinds of persons (Davies, 1991). Theorising from a poststructuralist feminist perspective is to understand the discourses from which we speak and by which we are constituted. From the speaking positions available to us, we speak ourselves into existence (Davies, 1991). Identity and subjectivity are constituted through a person’s position in different discourses, which vary in terms of the power they offer individuals (Widdicombe, 1995).

Subject positions are fluid and transitory and are constantly open to movement and change. Everyday conversations as well as professional conversations, call us to “take ourselves up as persons” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p.62), each exchange calling us to respond to the speaker in certain ways. It is this conceptualising of self, as a constantly evolving, storying subject, which offers more possibilities for a re-authoring conversation in narrative practice. Knowing *how* persons change subject positions in conversations has particular value for professional practice and for research practice. As Winslade (2005) articulated:

Less attention has been paid to processes by which persons shift and change position. How persons make changes in identity projects is crucial, however, to the kind of research that might inform the practice of therapy. (p.362)

This study addresses how participants and I changes our positions in supervision talk. Changes in subject positions lie in making visible the discursive powers of particular discourses and the ways they subjugate us (Davies, et al., 2006). Discursive shifts occur in moments “when habitual ways of thinking are dislodged” (p.99). When habitual ways of thinking are dislodged, or troubled, fundamental changes occur in the possible ways of being that are available to oneself and others (Davies, 1991). In the results stories I show how I dislodged or troubled the taken-for-granted in my own thinking and in the research participants’ understandings. The poststructural concept of deconstruction is a discursive tool that is used in narrative practice to dislodge habitual ways of thinking about counselling practice and identity formation.

## **Deconstruction**

The central concept of deconstruction is the critical analysis of text. Theorised by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1997), deconstruction is an approach to reading texts, written and spoken, for their absent or repressed meanings. Language, according to Derrida, contains hidden meanings and internal contradictions and can be subverted to render these meanings visible. A meaning of a word is contingent on other words, often expressed as binaries, for example we understand the colour white in relation to black: or female in relation to male. Distinguishing the difference between one particular concept in relation to another, assists us to make meaning of the original concept.

Deconstruction therefore, enables us to see that which we normally disattend or that which is invisible to us (Davies, 1997). A deconstructive gaze is one of looking *at* language, noticing its surface imperfections, nuances, tonal shades, and shards of prismatic light. In therapeutic contexts, a deconstructive inquiry traces the workings of power by identifying how people are positioned in particular ways through particular discourses. Dominant stories restrain us from noticing other information or events: what does not fit the dominant discourse is edited out. As articulated by Hare-Mustin (1994), psychotherapy and counselling can be oppressive, not only for what they include but for what they exclude. A deconstructive inquiry works to expose the effects of exclusion. Examples of a deconstructive inquiry are offered by White (1995a) in relation to diagnosing and

naming practices:

What knowledges are privileged in a particular process of naming and what knowledges are rendered irrelevant or disqualified in this process? Who is qualified to speak and to name, and under what circumstances is it acceptable for them to do so? What relational practices and techniques of power are associated with acts of naming, of diagnosing, and what are the real effects on persons' lives of these particular practices and techniques? (p.110)

When texts are deconstructed, or put “under erasure”, these hidden meanings are exposed. Derrida put a cross through the ~~word~~ he was deconstructing so as to leave the word visible and readable. The cross signals that the ~~word~~ is under erasure, not entirely suitable; not entirely dispensable. The visibility of the word signals that it is still a word we need to use as we do not yet know how to proceed without it. Following Freud, Derrida (as cited in Sampson, 1989b) used the example of the Mystic Writing Pad with its flimsy layer which, when lifted, removed fresh inscriptions and left traces of previous inscriptions. He used this example as an illustration that texts are *always already* (a term employed by Derrida) in spite of erasure. Humanist inscriptions and re-inscriptions are evident in my thinking and speaking, even although I position myself within poststructural discourse. Words are already second hand as Margaret Wetherall (1995) expressed: “already in circulation, already familiar, already there, waiting for moments of appropriation” (p.134). Davies (2004) called on the metaphor of a palimpsest to suggest that however we might write ourselves anew, traces of previous ideas, actions, values and feelings show through.

Deconstructing a word, therefore, does not make the word irrelevant. As I discuss in Chapter 5, when I attempted to deconstruct the term “challenging”, I found myself still wanting to use the concept of challenging but in a different context. Putting a word under erasure does not obliterate it for we may want to still use it elsewhere. As with Elisabeth St. Pierre (1997), I want to “both use and reject” (p.177) the categories of language available to me. I still want to use and not-use the word “challenge” until such times as I find a more adequate term. Similarly, the term “supervisee” as discussed by Crocket (2001) is not entirely suitable for a

storying supervision reaching to offer subject positions for practitioners. One way to continue using the term supervisee might be to put it under erasure, thus ~~supervisee~~. Once a word has been put under erasure, it becomes visible for its inadequacy and necessity.

A deconstructive term offered by Davies (2000) is that of “troubling” (p.14), as in the waters are troubled or agitated. Davies’ term suggests to me a stirring up or an act of curiosity. I call on the act of “troubling” throughout this thesis to disrupt and unsettle “those knowledges that have been taken to be certain and secure” (Davies et al., 2004, p.4). Wetherall (1998) also used the term “troubling” (p.397) when analysing how we are offered position calls to accept commonly acceptable statements of self and how we might make them less obviously acceptable. She asked questions that did not confirm the acceptability of the original positioning. For example, rather than accept a diagnosis, I might ask: “that’s an interesting description, would the client describe herself in that way?” Asking questions such as “what is the history of that idea/term/label?” or “Who might that idea serve?” makes visible the hidden assumptions and invites people to step into an evaluative, reflexive position. Questions of this kind in supervision disturb the apparently acceptable truth claims that go unnoticed in a practitioner’s speaking.

From a feminist poststructural perspective, deconstruction is a political act, “a form of epistemological and political accountability” (Ganguly, 1992, p.66). Deconstructing what we take to be true is central to narrative supervision practice. Engaging in a deconstructive inquiry in supervision is to enter the realm of epistemology and politics (Crocket, 2001). Supervision, I suggest, needs to trouble the discourses through which clients and counsellors have been constituted in oppressive ways. However, I acknowledge that deconstruction is a complex endeavour. Too much “troubling” and supervision becomes disruptive: too little and supervision risks becoming a collusive, cosy conversation. With these relevant poststructural ideas laid out, I now examine how identity formation is shaped on these theoretical terms.

### **Poststructuralist understandings of identity**

A poststructural understanding of the subject as a *position* within a particular gendered, social, or cultural discourse has challenged the concept of humanistic

individualism (Henriques et al., 1984). On poststructural terms, identity is not “discovered” but produced relationally and contextually. Unlike humanistic psychology, which considers the subject-as-agent, “master” of his own fortune, poststructural or discursive psychology considers the subject as constructed within “culturally-specific narratives, regimes of truth, patterns of power and forms of ideology” (Parker, 1998, p.7). The construction of the self is relational rather than individual, and happens “in ways which are socially specific” (Weedon, 1987, p.21). Identity is shaped by the social structures, contexts, and relations of power in which we are located. The self is not considered “an intuitively and essential self to know, one that just sits there ready to be portrayed in words” (Bruner, 2004, p.4), but one created in conversations between people. On these terms, identity does not prefigure action, (waiting to be discovered) but is achieved through action, through discourse, the social practices, ways of speaking, thinking and acting that are available to us (Butler, 1990; Davies et al., 2006).

I am drawn to an understanding of identity as an ongoing project for it offers me conditions of possibilities to become other than I have been. As asserted by Wendy Drewery and Gerald Monk (1994): “Who I am is a subject of constant change, an open process of becoming, rather than a movement towards an end point; it is a dynamic way of being, rather than a search for an inner core” (p.305). In drawing this distinction between an essential self and a storying self, I do not imply a fixed binary. As with the “flimsy”, or palimpsest in the previous discussion on deconstruction, both humanist and constructionist forms of identity coexist in a complex pattern of layered interaction.

In the last section of this chapter, I give a more detailed account of Narrative Therapy and show how the concepts of positioning, authorship and agency are used in supervision to enhance professional identity.

### **Section 3: Narrative Therapy**

Narrative Therapy originated in Australia and New Zealand from the collaboration between Michael White and David Epston (1990). I find it thought provoking that these countries are geographically located “at the edge” of the world. The edge of a system has been referred to as the most innovative and generative place: “The



action is at the margins, where there is freedom to create away from the orthodoxy of the centre” (Roberts, 2004). I suggest that Narrative Therapy with its focus on socio-political discourse and its understanding that identity is produced through positioning in relations of power is disturbing for traditional intrapsychic, depoliticised psychodynamic and psychotherapeutic therapy.

Narrative Therapy is more akin to a folk psychology (White, 2004) than a structuralist psychology. Narrative Therapy centres a person’s own subjective truth claims and contextual knowledges, skills, and resources for living and rejects generalised, objective, pathological truth claims. Its focus is a therapeutic inquiry, which honours a person’s history of struggle and assists them to story more satisfying descriptions of self and relationships. Drawing from Bruner’s (1986) literary text analogy, White and Epston developed a form of therapy that was “a renegotiation of the stories of one’s life and therefore a renegotiation of one’s identity” (White, 2007, p.82). A narrative approach is one of respectful curiosity about the values and purposes persons hold for their lives and relationships. Inviting a person to speak to what is of value to them, alongside the problem that has brought them to counselling, produces more hope-filled conversations. “Doing hope together” (Weingarten, 2010) can lead to inspirational conversations, encouraging both practitioner and client.

One way of doing hope together is through speaking about problems in externalising ways (White, 1989; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1996). Externalising is a linguistic practice that brings to the surface the internalisation of dominant discourses shaping a person’s meaning of their life and identity. Talking about problems in externalising ways invites a person to take up a reflexive and authoritative stance in relation to the problems they bring to counselling. Externalising problems makes their creation by and existence in, relations of power and everyday local cultural practices visible.

Narrative practice embraces a socio-political approach to therapy by taking account of local and indigenous knowledges, and gender, economic and cultural critiques. Problems are not understood through essentialist discourses of personality or as residing within individuals, families or communities. The narrative aphorism that the person is not the problem: the problem is the problem

(White, 1989), stands in contrast to pathologising discourses that locate problems as a result of internal structures, personality deficit, or family of origin dysfunction. Regardless of “social structure, family of origin dramas, or environmental contingencies” (Winslade, 2005, p.351), narrative practice emphasises life as a multi-storied experience and works to co-author richer accounts of experience. It does this by drawing on Bruner’s (1986) conceptual landscapes of the mind.

### **Landscapes of action and identity**

The metaphor of “landscapes of the mind” (Bruner, 1986) serves as an interpretative frame by which persons consciously and intentionally make meaning of lived experiences. Bruner (1986) conceptualised the *landscape of action* as a place where the “material” for a story takes place—plot, themes, characters and events. Experiences from this landscape are taken into the *landscape of consciousness* where we make sense of what we “know, think, or feel, or do not know, think, or feel” (Bruner, 1986, p.14). In the landscape of identity (White & Epston, 1990) we make meaning of our experiences, our thoughts, feelings and actions and we construct ourselves as particular persons.

From a narrative perspective it is through language that we come to know our feelings. Making *meaning* of our experiences and expressions, we come to understand their significance and how they construct us as particular types of persons. Language constitutes our thoughts, emotions, actions, and identity. As Bruner (2004) deliberated, the self is “a narrative phenomenon that is created and constantly being recreated in a conversational domain” (p.4). This means that from a narrative perspective, we do not try to discern or intuit our essential self, a self already in existence, waiting to be portrayed in words but we create ourselves in relation, through language. In Chapter 6, I show how dissonance arose in supervision between a binary construct of heart/mind or *meanings* and *feelings*.

The distinction between a surface/depth metaphor and a thick/thin metaphor is also a useful concept used in narrative practice. White (2004), following the work of Geertz (1973), used the metaphor of thin/thick descriptions to describe his practice. Rather than searching inside a person for the real cause of their problems, White sought to thicken expressions of values and beliefs, actions and intentions,

and hopes and dreams that gave purpose and meaning to a person's life. White (2007) believed that internal and universal explanations for action were "quite thin and take us into conversational culdesacs" (p.143). For example, attributing causality of problems to internal psychological structures, personality disorders, disenfranchised grief, or assumed underlying individual, relational or familial deficit conditions take us into a fixed realm of already existing meanings.

A popular misconception about Narrative Therapy is that it turns negatives into positives. I show this idea at work in Chapter 8 when re-storying old stories of self-criticism. Rather than a particular change in mind-set, or changing negatives into positives, a narrative understanding of identity is shaped in the realm of our intentions and commitments, values and beliefs, and hopes and dreams. White (2000) proposed that it was in the storying of these non-structural, intentional identity conclusions that people found opportunities to progressively distance, or to be transported from the problematic in their lives. Once distanced from negative identity conclusions or thin stories of self, people become knowledgeable about matters of how to proceed in their life (White, 2002).

Possibilities for re-authoring negative identity conclusions become possible through persistent, carefully crafted inquiry, tailored in response to a person's speaking and woven between landscapes of action and landscapes of identity. I listen for those expressions that may contain possibilities for movement: expressions that transport a person to another place (White, 2007). Through maps of inquiry and practices of double-listening, externalisation, and deconstructive inquiry, I notice expressions which might lead to more self-appreciative identity conclusions. White called these alternative expressions of experience, "unique outcomes". These unique outcomes, or sparkling moments, became entry points into new storylines that construct alternative identity development. In the four results stories, I show how stories of acknowledgement and appreciative self-witnessing in supervision worked to counteract previously held stories of self-in-error or self-depreciation and moved participants elsewhere.

In preference to the humanist project of trying to find out who we "truly are", the task in a narrative practice is to story who we are becoming, and how we are becoming other than we have already been, in relation to what is of value to us,

including our relationships with others. These new alternative stories are achievements that persons take an active part in constructing and performing (White, 1995). As we speak ourselves into existence, we are not only telling stories about ourselves: we perform ourselves. As we enact and perform ourselves in more preferred ways and in relation to an audience, we become other than we have been (Freedman & Combs, 1996). As we are listened to and witnessed by others, we are authenticated and acknowledged in ways that further encourage the performance of preferred stories of self. In Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, as participants performed new understandings of themselves in supervision and research conversations they experienced acknowledgement and recognition, which in turn encouraged them to more fully inhabit those new understandings. In the telling (supervision) and re-telling (research), they produced themselves differently. Storying what was meaningful for them in the reflective/research meetings, stories co-authored in supervision, provided conditions of possibility for alternative descriptions of identity.

Identity as performance brings me to the next theoretical concept important to this study. Narrative practices of acknowledgement and appreciative self-witnessing (White, 1997), and practices of compassionate witnessing (Weingarten, 2000), also work to deconstruct or unpack “negative identity conclusions” (White, 2001).

### **Witnessing theory**

In giving value to what is important to us, Weingarten (2000; 2003; 2009), theorised “compassionate witnessing” as a way of turning bystander, passive witnessing of violence and violation into effective action. Effective action may be as small as offering an opportunity for a person to speak about what they have witnessed. Compassionate witnessing may occur in daily practices of acknowledgement in everyday conversations as well as therapeutic conversations. In supervision, I position myself as an intentional witness (White, 2007) and a compassionate witness (Weingarten, 2003), acknowledging both the stories of injustice, abuse or violence that might be brought to supervision, and acknowledging a practitioner as a witness to these stories she hears in her counselling practice. In the results chapters, I show how the positions of self-witnessing and compassionate witnessing were taken up in supervision by me as

supervisor and by participants.

The final task for this chapter is to show how a narrative approach to supervision utilises the poststructural theories discussed, particularly the theoretical tools of positioning, agency, authorship and the concept of identity as a storying subject.

### **Narrative approaches to supervision**

Just as Narrative Therapy is a renegotiation of one's personal identity, narrative approaches to supervision and counsellor education is a renegotiation of one's professional identity (see for example, Crocket, 2002; 2004b; 2007; Drewery & Monk, 1994; Speedy, 2001; Winslade, 2002; Winslade, Crocket, Monk, & Drewery, 2000; Winslade, Monk, & Drewery, 1997). When supervision is conceptualised as a storying practice, attention is paid to how discourse works to constitute practitioners in particular ways. Just as we are dependent upon the available cultural discourses in the production of our personal identity, in supervision, we are dependent on "the available professional discourses in the production of our professional identity"(Crocket, 2004b, p.175). The kinds of speaking positions I make available for others, will determine how power relations are being enacted in that moment.

Therefore, in supervision, I am required to attend to the speaking positions I make available for practitioners. The kinds of speaking positions I offer in the discourse of supervision will determine how practitioners story their professional identity. Just as I work to position clients as agents and mediators of their own life stories, I work to position counsellors as agents and mediators of their counselling practice. To help me in these tasks, I employ narrative practices of re-authoring conversations, curious inquiry, double-listening and other narrative maps of inquiry (see White, 2007), which I demonstrate in the results stories. In those chapters, I present data which examine how discursive shifts were made possible through my responses to the discourses shaping the participants' speaking.

### **Agency and authorship**

The concept of *agency* and *authorship* are central organising principles of narrative supervision practice. In narrative language, White (2007) viewed agency as a relational, fluid position that "casts people as active mediators and negotiators

of life's meanings and predicaments" (p.103). On Davies (1991) terms, and as argued by Crocket (1999, 2001) in the context of supervision, the concept of *authority* is to have access to a speaking position within a particular discourse. As noted in the previous chapter, traditional supervision tends to ignore the politics of power relations and the "social and cultural locatedness of client, counsellor and supervisor" (Crocket, 2004c, p.10). The speaking positions offered in developmental supervision discourses do not always position counsellors well to take up active authorship of their own practice.

To explain further the nuanced use of positioning theory and the concept of *authority* for supervision practice, I point to a textual example taken from the NZAC Code of Ethics (2002). For example, as argued by Crocket (2001) the term "supervisee" functions grammatically to suggest a passive positioning in relation to a supervisor, as though the practitioner is being acted on by the supervisor. Earlier, on page 21, I noted that the NZAC Code of Ethics does not use the term, supervisee but the term counsellor. The use of the subjective term, "counsellor" calls practitioners into an active subject positions in supervision. It is counsellors who are called to take responsibility for selecting aspects of their practice to take to supervision and for monitoring their competence, safety, and fitness to practice. Supervisors are called to assist them in this task.

All position calls have particular implications for subjectivity and experience (Willig, 2001). The language used in the NZAC's description of supervision, clearly calls counsellors into positions of responsibility and authorship of their own practice. In contrast, when Jean Martel (2006), as convenor of the NZAC's Supervision Accreditation Panel, wrote: "The profession of counselling requires that all practicing counsellors are supervised" (p.14), the words "are supervised", position counsellors in a subjected position to supervisors and less agentively than the language used in the NZAC's Code of Ethics. It is not the requirement that counsellors are supervised that I draw attention to here: it is the loss of the position of *authority* and *authorship* for counsellors that I note. The work of language in this example, although subtle, illustrates the usefulness of positioning theory that I utilise in supervision and in this study.

In the results stories, I explore the application of the ideas and practices I have

discussed in this chapter. In order to speak difference in the spaces between humanistic ideas of identity and constructionist, narrative ideas of identity, I try to listen carefully for and actively create conditions of possibilities. Sustaining an ethic of relationality in supervision, inviting practitioners into positions of authority, and discussing the oppressive effects of social, cultural, or gendered discourses, are the tasks I set myself in supervision.

### **The work of this chapter**

This chapter laid out the theoretical landscapes of Social Constructionism and Poststructuralism which underpin a narrative supervision practice. It discussed a narrative approach to supervision, shaped by poststructural theories of discourse, power relations, deconstruction, positioning, and the concepts of agency and authorship. At this stage in telling the story of my research project, the scene has been set, the site of inquiry established, and the theoretical bodies of knowledge articulated. The theoretical landscapes I have discussed in this chapter shape the research methodology, methods of inquiry, data generation, my approach to data-analysis, and the storying of research findings. My next task is to show that the methodology chosen to research my practice was congruent with the theoretical base of a narrative supervision that I have discussed in this chapter. In the following chapter, I discuss and account for my chosen research methodology, explain the research design, introduce the research participants, and discuss the ethical complexity of critical practitioner-inquiry.

## **Chapter 4: Research methodology and design**

### **Introduction**

This chapter builds on the theoretical frameworks underpinning a narrative supervision and is divided into two sections. I first discuss the ethical considerations that guided me in producing my methodological approach. I then detail aspects of practitioner-research, feminist critical reflexivity, and narrative inquiry that I employed to investigate my practice dilemmas. In the second section I describe the research process, introduce the research participants and explain my methods of analysis. In the spirit of narrative practices of acknowledgement, a letter to the research participants is offered as both a practice of acknowledgment and a bridge between the process of research and the outcomes of research.

The aim of methodology is to help understand not only the products, or outcomes of research, but the process of inquiry itself (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2001). The aim of this study was to investigate how dissonance arose in supervision (the process) and the relational and professional effects of dissonance (the outcomes). My methodology needed to allow an examination of the discursive tensions producing the ethical dilemmas in my supervision practice, and to do so in ways that took into account the “moral dimension of research” (McLeod, 2001a, p.196). Before discussing my methodological process, I re-present my research questions:

1. What opportunities and limitations do social constructionist ideas and narrative approaches to supervision make possible for students learning humanistic-oriented approaches to counselling?
2. What are the relational effects of an interdiscursive supervision practice?
3. How are differences in theoretical orientation collaboratively negotiated in supervision in ways that open space for robust, generative dialogue and reflection on practice?

As potential research participants would be engaged in supervision with me, I recognised that my practitioner-research inquiry had implications for them. Therefore, I looked for a methodology that addressed my research questions and held in focus my relationship with potential participants. For, like Crocket (2001),



I was mindful of constructing a research methodology that reflected the same ethical relations required of professional supervision practice. Thus, I worked to produce a research “bricolage”, described by Joe Kincheloe (2005) as “multimethodological, multilogical forms of inquiry into the social, cultural, political, psychological, and educational domains” (p.323). Kincheloe’s (2001) previously used term, “interdisciplinarity”, described the kind of knowledge work that my study required, in the liminal zone between different theoretical orientations.

If the cutting edge of research lives at the intersection of disciplinary borders, then developing the bricolage is a key strategy in the development of rigorous and innovative research. The facilitation and cultivation of boundary work is a central element of this process. (p.690)

Creating safe dialogical space at intersections of humanist and constructionist “disciplines” meant employing data-generating processes that positioned participants as agentic speaking subjects at those intersections. Drawing on positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990), I was mindful of keeping an open and collaborative co-inquiry space in order to hear the participants’ experiences of supervision. From feminist theory (Davies et al., 2004; Weedon, 1987), I applied a critical reflexivity to investigate, not only their experiences, but also my own discursive practices. While I sought the ethos of a collaborative co-inquiry or participatory-action research (Heron & Reason, 2006), collaborative processes were not possible throughout all stages of my study because the design, selection, analysis, and re-presentation of the data rested with me as primary instigator and researcher of my practice. Through “blurring the genres” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.25) in this way, I constructed a methodological design that followed emerging trends in practitioner-inquiry (McLeod, 2003). My methodological “bricolage” sought to address the complex power relations of my positioning as supervisor, and to bridge the divide between practice, theory, and research.

## Section 1: Methodologies

### Practitioner-inquiry

This study is located in the research domain of practitioner-inquiry. Practitioner-research is designed to produce knowledge-in-context for the development of the practitioner's practice and is an emerging trend in qualitative counselling research (McLeod, 2003). As a process of intersubjective knowledge production, practitioner-inquiry is considered a robust form of inquiry because it values "multiperspectival understandings" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p.388). Practitioner-researchers learn from persons they work with, thus disrupting the traditional research dichotomy between those who "know" and those who are "studied". My study generated collaborative knowledge for the benefit of the research participants' counselling practice and my own supervision practice. Taking up McLeod's (2001b) challenge that practice and research appeared to "inhabit quite different worlds" (p.3), I worked to produce a study that was relevant to the practice of supervision and to practitioner-inquiry.

### Reflective practice and reflexive practice

Although both terms are used sometimes interchangeably in the practitioner-research literature, I wish to make a distinction here between *reflexive* practitioner-inquiry and *reflective* practitioner-inquiry. On critical terms, a reflexive approach to research calls us to pay attention to the politics of research practice and our interpretive frame through which we make meaning of our inquiry. In this study, I draw on a critical reflexivity to analysis the spoken text and my own discursive positioning. As a researcher, I am still a discursive subject, shaped by particular theoretical and therapeutic discourses and I seek to make my preferences transparent in my analysis.

In practitioner-inquiry, reflexivity has been hailed as an appropriate method for counsellors to research their practice. John Lees (2001) claimed that counsellors are already familiar with reflexive processes from clinical practice and from supervision, which he regarded as a form of reflexive action-research in itself. Kim Etherington (2004) also argued that reflexivity was a skill counsellors develop: "an ability to notice our responses to the world around us, other people and events, and to use that knowledge to inform our actions, communication and

understandings” (p.19). Although Lees (2001) described his research as “political, transformational and consciousness-raising” (p.133), his conclusions were produced within and through particular therapeutic discourses. For example, he claimed that his psychodynamic training gave him a way to understand the nature of the therapeutic relationship and helped him make sense of an earlier, disturbing clinical experience, the focus of a later reflection (Lees, 2003). While I, too, am producing research from a poststructural framework, I attempt to adopt a critical posture in relation to that framework. I seek to make my sense-making of research outcomes transparent rather than assumed. For example, Lees (2003) acknowledged that his sense-making, “relied entirely on psychodynamic theory and my point of view” (p.150). He wrote:

This initial research looked at the entanglement of the inner worlds of the client and mine, its aetiology, and its usefulness for both of us, although, of course, I can only speculate about its usefulness for the client. It helped me to realise that, although therapeutic work sometimes creates an ‘emotional storm’ (Symington, 1986: 29), one can, with the help of theory, make sense of this and thereby tolerate it. (p.150)

I sought to do more than speculate about the usefulness of supervision for the counsellors in my study—I wanted to create speaking positions whereby participants could speak about their experiences of supervision, including its usefulness, or not. In addition, I desired to do more than tolerate the “emotional storm” I experienced when different understandings of therapeutic practice collided in supervision. Reflexivity on Lees’ terms did not theorise the moments of discursive dissonance and the “emotional disturbance” (Dewey, [1910]1997, p.73) that I wished to research. It was *what* and *how* meanings constituted the speaking action that I wished to examine, not only the action.

I make this distinction not to criticise a psychodynamic perspective, but to expose the “paradigm-locatedness” (Crocket, 2001) of the therapeutic assumptions shaping our counselling practice and our research practice. The particular discursive lenses we look through as researchers will produce particular outcomes. Lees’ (2003) reflective research helped him achieve his aims, which were: to “watch” himself when working with clients; to supervise his

“countertransference reactions”; and to “work with the experiences as opposed to being paralysed by them” (p.150). My aims for my study were quite different. I did not want to “watch myself” on the terms Lees proposed for himself, or to supervise my “countertransference reactions”. I intentionally sought to understand practitioners’ experiences at those places of disturbance as well as my own for I wanted to stay relationally responsive and connected in those moments of dissonance. I wanted to understand how the language called on in supervision produced various speaking positions for both a practitioner and for me at moments of discursive difference and discomfort. And I wanted to produce research outcomes that were congruent and consistent with the theoretical epistemologies of my supervision practice. Therefore, I needed theoretical tools to understand the effects of different discourses, of different psychodynamic theories, of inner worlds and of socially constructed worlds.

Relying only on my self-awareness and my ability to notice and reflect on action, might not produce the outcomes I desired. Only giving an account *of* the differences I noticed, would not stretch my understanding *for* those differences, or the effects of those differences for the subjectivities of the participants, including my own. Producing an account for *how* I made sense of data, as well as analysing that data, required a *critical* reflexive awareness (Hawes, 1998; Pillow, 2003). A critically reflexive stance invokes an awareness of what we are doing, in our doing of it, and openness to opportunities for alternatives. It requires a deconstructive relation to self: “we must ourselves become reflexively aware of the character of our own practices” (Hawes, 1998, p.99). Becoming reflexively aware of the character of my own discursive practices required me to critically reflect on my discursive strategies.

A further distinction I wish to make between the critical reflexivity I employ in this study and reflective practitioner-inquiry is the division between the personal and professional. McLeod (2003) suggested that research findings would: “make more sense to readers if they were truly *reflexive*, if they communicated not only the hard data but the personal meaning as well” (p.186, italics in original). While I support the values of transparency in McLeod’s words, isolating personal meaning from professional meaning is problematic in a feminist, reflexive

epistemology. From a feminist perspective, the personal is the professional and both domains are inexorably connected.

Reflexivity in practitioner-inquiry is seen as a vehicle for practitioner growth and development (Etherington, 2004), a means of self-understanding and self-surveillance (Lees, 2003), an opportunity to improve one's practice and to offer personal insights (McLeod, 2003). Taking the concept of practitioner reflexivity further, I strived for a reflexivity in this study which punctured the rhetoric of my speaking and was disjunctive of the discourse itself. By employing a reflexivity that makes my presence visible *in* the text through iterative and consciously self-analytical reflection *on* the text (Lather, 1991), my study was thus similar to and different from other forms of practitioner-inquiry. In recognising that I was integrally part of the research process and outcomes, I called on a feminist critical reflexivity as part of my methodological "bricolage".

### **Feminist critical reflexivity**

The question of researcher/author objectivity has been well troubled by feminist research (see for example, Hertz, 1997; Holman Jones, 2005; Lather, 1988; 1997; Oakley, 1981, 1999; Reinharz, 1992; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Feminist approaches to knowledge production, transparency, and re-presentation processes shape this study. As researcher, I was "integrally participating in and affecting the outcomes of the research" (Pinn, 2001, p.185). As an active shaper of the data-texts, I was positioned as an "embodied knower" (Lather, 2007, p.92) inside the text that I helped to produce and was produced by. Therefore, I was attentive to the politics of my research practices while working for openness, engagement, intimacy, and equalitarian relationships (Oakley, 1999). My dual positioning as supervisor and researcher meant that egalitarian and non-hierarchical relations were not always possible. In generating data, I designed collaborative processes that shifted "the balance of power and control toward the research participants" (Wilkinson, 1999, p232). In the selection and analysis of data, I chose more unilateral methods.

Feminist research has been described as a reflexive practice, which "must always undertake a deconstruction of its claims and accounts" (Ganguly, 1992, p.66). Therefore in my approach to analysing participants' experiences of supervision, I

called on critical reflexivity to interrogate what was happening in supervision and to give an account for my interpretation. Davies et al. (2006) suggested that this kind of reflexivity allows us to see how language works to constitute the world; including the way language works to produce us as subjects: “The subject as researcher sees simultaneously the object of her or his gaze and the means by which the object (which may include oneself as subject) is being constituted” (p.360). As I sought to understand how language-in-use constituted participants and myself as subjects, I found my reading of data to be complex, inconsistent, and in constant process. Although reflexivity might be regarded as the new canon (Lather, 1993), there are deep tensions in the practice of it, as I found out in my analysis. Reflexivity runs the danger of being too self-consciously reflexive (Davies et al., 2004), narcissistic (Macbeth, 2001), or over-indulgent (Pillow, 2003). There are few guidelines, as Davies et al. (2004) noted, for the *doing* of reflexivity, especially in a way that is reflexive while noting the limits of self-reflexivity. According to Davies et al.,

To attempt to deconstruct one’s own work, is to risk buying into the faith in the powers of critical reflection that places emancipatory efforts in such a contradictory position with the poststructuralist foregrounding of the limits of consciousness. (p.4)

Thus, in my attempt to deconstruct my practice, I was not immune to the limits of my consciousness. As I analysed data-texts, I experienced the “slippages and ambivalences” of reflexivity (Davies et al., 2004), throwing into relief what was previously invisible to me in my supervision practice. A deconstructive reflexivity interrupted my relationship with my own certainties and “disturbed the disturbances” (Pillow, 2003, p.18) in my own discursive practices.

In reference to a narrative research epistemology, Hillary Byrne-Armstrong (2001) claimed that such a methodological approach requires holding “the social space open for multi-storied narratives while recognising the politics of difference between narratives” (p.69). In addition, when multiple interpretations are exposed, she suggested that the “cracks and fissures in what otherwise looks like fixed and absolute truths, become invisible” (p.75). This was particularly so in the practice stories I tell in Chapters 6 and 7 when cracks and fissures appeared in

participants' "absolute truths" and in my own taken-for-granted assumptions.

I now examine how narrative co-inquiry supported me to recognise and speak to the politics of difference is supervision.

### **Narrative co-inquiry**

As a methodological tool, narrative inquiry, like the practice of reflexivity, does not have well developed guidelines or processes and research outcomes are not certain. Narrative research produces outcomes which are unique in their particularity and grounded in first-hand experience (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). A narrative inquirer understands that persons "live storied lives on storied landscapes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.145) and refrains from overly interpreting those landscapes. As a narrative practitioner, I was familiar with co-inquiry as a relational approach to knowledge production. Therefore, in generating data for my study, I built on my existing narrative skills of inquiry. I sought to centre the supervision experiences of the research participants and to offer subjective speaking positions for them in the research conversations. As researcher, I was less assured about my skills of research inquiry, particular as it was the effects of my practice I was inquiring about. At times when I refrained from speaking my responses in the research conversations, I experienced my feminist researcher-self absent from the data texts. I write more about this experience in Chapter 9 as well as the possible limitations of my chosen methodologies.

In this next section, I present the pragmatics of the research design. I foreground ethical considerations before introducing the research participants. I then describe the research process, methods of analysis, and the re-presentation of outcomes. I conclude this section with a letter to the participants, illustrating narrative practices of acknowledgement (White, 2007).

## **Section 2: Research Design**

### **Addressing ethical concerns**

I first canvassed student counsellors in supervision with me, in an informal way, to inquire if they might be interested in my project. I then contacted the

counsellor-training provider for their initial approval. Once received, I wrote a formal ethics proposal to the University of Waikato, School of Education Ethics Committee. After further discussion with the Ethics Committee around ethical complexities of supervisor-as-researcher, I received approval to start my research.

To limit any possible sense of coercion for students already engaged in supervision with me, I extended the invitation to all students. Written invitations to join my project were posted out on my behalf by the counsellor-training programme to all students, those who had graduated at the end of the year, and those returning to complete their studies (Appendix 1). I had decided that four participants would be sufficient and should more wish to join, I would use a random selection process of picking names out of a hat as suggested by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2001). In the end, four self-selected participants joined me in my project.

### **Consent**

Informed consent is an on-going ethical requirement of professional practice, including research practice. Although participants had written information about the project from the start (Appendix, 2 & 3), I made opportunities for review of the research process as well as supervision throughout the project. Transcripts of research data-texts were made available to participants. As I got further into the analysis of data for the results chapters, I became troubled that my research design had not included the participants' comments/responses on the final stories. Although agreement for future publication of my thesis findings had been secured (see Appendix 4), I had not anticipated the outcomes of the analysis. I revisit these re-presentational dilemmas in chapter 9.

### **Confidentiality and privacy**

One of the complexities in practitioner-inquiry, especially research of supervision, is maintaining confidentiality and anonymity for clients. The NZAC Code of Ethics (NZAC, 2002) requires counsellors to use supervision to reflect on their work with clients. Therefore, for practitioners, *engaging* in supervision is not in itself an anonymous practice. However, I requested that participants disclose to clients that they were taking part in a research project (Appendix 3). Any information, which could identify clients was changed or omitted altogether in both the data transcripts and the production of results stories. Participants chose



pseudonyms for themselves and the clients they spoke about in supervision. In the event of a client questioning the research, I suggested that the practitioner clarify with a client that their counselling would not be recorded as part of the research project.

I emphasised that at any time in a recorded supervision, the video camera would be turned off if a participant did not want a particular part of the conversation recorded. In one supervision session, the recording was stopped and a section of the tape was erased. All recordings of supervision were viewed only by each participant and me, and recordings of reflective/research meetings were viewed only by my academic supervisors and me. Transcripts of both supervision and reflection conversations were available to my supervisors. I discussed each stage of my project with my supervisors whose comprehensive understanding of ethical practice guided me in research design and process.

### **Waiving of fees**

Reciprocity was an important factor in designing and carrying out my research project. Because I was asking participants to review recorded supervision sessions in their own time, I waived fees for the equivalent hours of supervision time. This financial arrangement might be viewed as an inducement to engage in the project. However, to charge fees for supervision and then ask participants to watch the recording of that supervision in their own time might also be regarded as exploitation. Once the data-generating stage of the project was complete, normal financial arrangements for supervision resumed.

### **Introducing the participants**

The self-selected participants were two newly qualified counsellors and two student counsellors. Claire, Louise, and Kay (pseudonyms) had prior experience of me as their supervisor but only Claire and Louise had attended the Narrative Therapy course I taught in their counselling training programme. April (pseudonym) had received the letter of invitation to join my project and was looking for a new supervisor the year my research project started. The multiple positionings of tutor, supervisor, and researcher called me to attend to different power relations in my study. My different relationship with each participant required me to attend to different aspects of their professional learning.

All four participants brought to my project different lived experiences, different assumptions about counselling, and varied understanding of narrative practice and supervision practice. There was a high level of trust in the process of supervision and a great willingness to assist me in learning more about my supervision practice. I was determined that the participants' participation in my project would enhance their supervision experience and professional learning as well as mine. After the data-generating phase was complete, all four participants continued in supervision with me.

### ***Claire***

Claire had engaged me for supervision in the final two years of her counsellor training and was a qualified counsellor at the data-generation phase of my project. She had attended the Narrative Therapy course I taught and had requested a narrative teaching focus in our supervision. Claire said she “felt at home” with its philosophy and non-pathologising approach and expressed a keen interest to learn more about narrative ideas as part of our supervision working agreement.

### ***Kay***

At the start of my research project, Kay and I had already worked together for one year in supervision and she had asked to continue in supervision with me for her final year. As Kay's professional supervisor, I carried no assessment responsibility for her course work but I was responsible in assisting her to prepare a video tape of a counselling session, which demonstrated a sufficient degree of competence. As her supervisor, I was automatically a member of the accreditation panel that then assessed this video and I wrote a report that contributed to Kay's final assessment. The centrality of evaluation and assessment in Kay's final year, and the multiple positionings of supervisor/assessor/researcher produced huge learning for me as a supervisor working with different theoretical orientations, while also attending to the requirements of a “training” supervision. Kay attended the Narrative Therapy course I taught on her training programme after the completion of data-generation, and continued in supervision with me for another two years.

### ***Louise***

As with Claire, Louise and I had worked together in supervision for her last two years of counsellor training, one of which had been shared with another student.

In her final year, Louise had attended the Narrative Therapy course I taught and was familiar with some narrative ideas and practices. In her first year as a qualified counsellor, at the start of my research project, Louise requested that we continue in supervision which we did for a further two years.

### *April*

April and I had not met prior to the research project. She had received the letter of invitation to participate in my research project and at the same time was looking for a new supervisor for the last two years of her training. It would not be until the beginning of the following year, the year after data-generation had ended, that April would attend the Narrative Therapy course. Therefore, April entered a supervisory relationship and joined my project, knowing little about me as a supervisor or about narrative practice. After the completion of data-generation, we continued in supervision for her final two years of training and then for one more year.

I now outline the steps I took to generate data for my study. **Figure 2** on page 68 shows the different phases of the research process.

## **Methods of inquiry**

### **Initial group meeting**

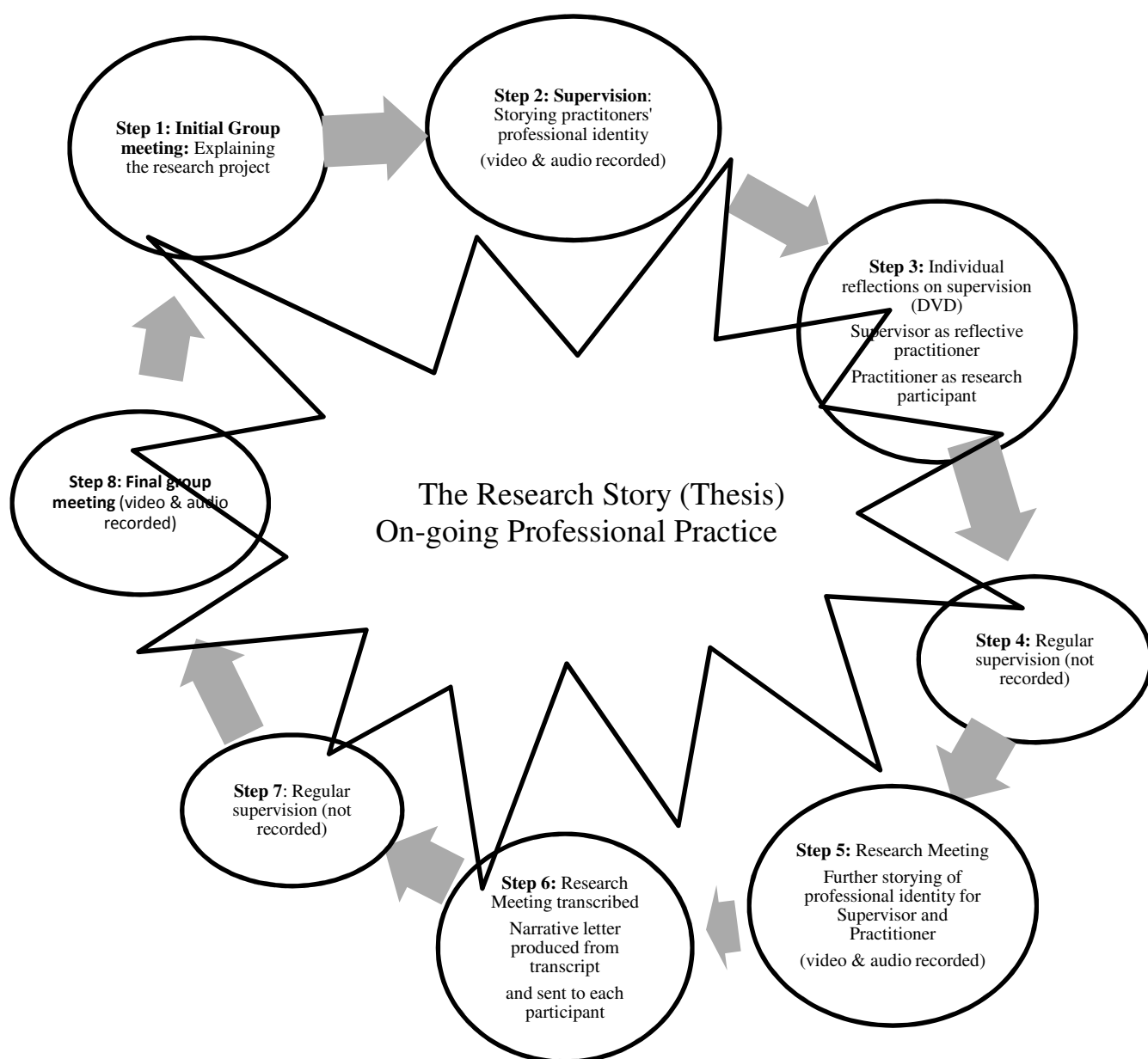
As part of the informed consent process, I first met with all participants as a group and reviewed the process of my study, ethical guidelines, research agreement and initial questions, which I had previously sent to them (see Appendices 2, 3, 4, & 5A). At this meeting, I explained my research purpose, intentions, and process. I emphasised the importance I placed on meeting requirements for supervision, especially for Kay and April, who were student counsellors. My initial questions below were shaped by ethics of informed consent, intended to position potential participants as well as possible in their deliberations over whether to join my research project. I sought to make my dual positioning as supervisor and researcher visible, and to reassure them that they could decline or withdraw without injuring our supervisory relationship. The initial questions were:

- What might be some of the advantages and disadvantages for you joining this research project?

- Are you clear about my intentions and reasons for wanting to do this research?
- What might be some areas of complexity that may arise for you?
- Are you reassured that confidentiality will be protected by the processes I have described?
- Are you clear about your right to withdraw from the research at any time up to one month after the last transcript has been made?
- How will you be able to tell me if the project becomes problematic for you?

This was the point of consent where we signed the research agreement (Appendix 4). One month after this initial meeting, the data-generating part of the project began.

**Figure 2: Phases of the research process**



Steps 2-7 were repeated 3 times with each participant, producing 24 DVDs.

### **Generating research data from supervision practice**

Three supervision sessions were audio and video recorded with each participant, followed by a reflective/research meeting a month later. I decided not to transcribe our supervision conversation into text for participants to read. Research in counselling had found that clients watching themselves on tape had a more powerful effect than reading transcripts of the same therapy session (Rennie, 1992). In the light of this research with clients in counselling, I also took account of West and Clark's (2004) research on supervision. They found that:

...the simple act of videoing a supervision session and then playing it back with IPR [Interpersonal Process Recall] had an immediate impact on both the supervisor and the supervisees and on the supervisory relationship. The IPR sessions were moments of insight for Supervisor and Supervisee and such insights seemed likely to be fed back, or in some other way to influence, the future working alliance. (p.21)

Although I did not call on IPR in this project, in view of West and Clark's experiences, I transferred the video onto a DVD for participants to take home and watch in their own time. I supplied questions as guidelines only (Appendix 5A) to assist their reflections. I also watched the video of the supervision before meeting with each participant for the reflective/research meeting a month later. Regular fortnightly supervision continued between the recorded supervision sessions.

### **Data generation: Research conversations**

Two weeks following our regular supervision and four weeks after the recorded supervision, I interviewed each participant about her reflections on the recorded supervision. These research conversations were also audio/video recorded. As part of my research design, I took up a co-inquirer position in these meetings and intentionally decentred my experiences as supervisor in order to privilege the participants' experiences of supervision. I was motivated by a desire to create agentic speaking positions for participants and to respond to their responses in the moment, rather than structuring the meetings to my own questions. I did not wish to derail, constrain, or overly shape the participants' reflections. This meant that my researcher-self sometimes remained in the background of these conversations. Aware of this discursive positioning at the time, in the results stories I reflect on

the effects of this positioning for my research questions.

### **Final group meeting**

At the end of the data-generating stage, I held a final group meeting. Suggested reflective questions were sent before this meeting (see Appendix 5B). This meeting was also recorded and transcribed as primary data for my analysis. On reflection, time allocated for this meeting was not sufficient to generate all the data that might have resulted from individual discussions. Not all questions that I had wanted to ask were addressed in this meeting. Consequently, discussions with each participant and me continued after the formal data-generation process had concluded. These informal conversations influenced my selection and analysis of data, as did supervision with my academic supervisors.

I did not include the four recorded meetings with my academic supervisors as primary data. However, we reviewed a DVD of a reflective/research conversation for each participant. These supervision conversations acted as further re-tellings of the re-tellings of supervision and assisted me in the final selection and analysis of research data. They also contributed to my on-going supervision and research practice. Thus, just as I was engaged in action-research of my supervision practice, I was also engaging in action-research of my research practice. On reflection, these recorded conversations were rich resources that may have been underutilised in the study. The complexity of accommodating further multiple relationships, i.e. supervisors-as-research-participants, inhibited me stretching my methodological bricolage.

In summary, as outlined in **Figure 3** on page 72, I progressively audio/video recorded three supervision sessions with each participant and three reflective/research meetings over the course of thirty weeks. In total, twelve supervision sessions, twelve research meetings, and the final group meeting were audio/video-recorded. Twelve reflective/research conversations and the final group meeting were transcribed as data-texts for analysis.

### **Transcription**

In transcribing the recordings, following Winslade (2003), I decided to privilege readability over linguistic accuracy as the intended audience of my study were fellow practitioners, counsellors, supervisors, and counsellor educators. Each

reflective/research recording was initially transcribed into text by a professional transcriber. I edited the transcripts for clarity and readability, working to represent the meaning of the participants' reflections as accurately as possible. While accepting that transcriptions of spoken text are not the same as the embodied spoken moments, my intentions were not to produce perfect transcripts. I regarded my task as listening with an interpretative focus in relation to my research questions rather than producing a perfect replication of the whole text. I took to heart Speedy's (2008) claim that all transcripts are interpretive acts, or "translation" (p.8). These edited transcripts became the primary data for my analysis, along with recordings of supervision. The extracts of data-texts I present in the four results chapters do not represent the richness of the original conversations. For the sake of brevity, I have selected only small segments of text.

After each reflective/research conversation, I wrote a narrative type letter (White & Epston, 1990) from my preliminary analysis of these transcripts to each participant (see Appendix 6 for an example). In writing these letters I was positioned both as supervisor and researcher. As supervisor, my intentions were to more richly describe participants' supervision experiences. As researcher, I wanted to meet my requirement for reciprocity and give back something useful to the participants. These letters, while capturing the research discussions, focussed more on the effects of supervision for the participants than on the research process. They documented participants' reflections on supervision, and any new understandings arising from the research conversations. The letters also served to further story development of their practice between regular supervision sessions.



**Figure 3: Research timetable**

	<b>Claire</b>	<b>Kay</b>	<b>Louise</b>	<b>April</b>
<b>Feb</b>	Initial meeting	Initial meeting	Initial meeting	Initial meeting
<b>Mar</b>	<b>1. Recorded supervision</b>			
<b>Weeks</b> <b>1</b>	<i>Reflection in own time</i>	<b>1. Recorded supervision</b>		Regular supervision
<b>2</b>	Regular supervision	<i>Reflection in own time</i>	<b>1. Recorded supervision</b>	
<b>3</b>		Regular supervision	<i>Reflection in own time</i>	<b>1. Recorded supervision</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>1. Research meeting</b>		Regular supervision	<i>Reflection in own time</i>
<b>5</b>	Letter sent	<b>1. Research meeting</b>		Regular supervision
<b>6</b>	Regular supervision	Letter sent	<b>1. Research meeting</b>	
<b>7</b>		Regular supervision	Letter sent	<b>1. Research meeting</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>2. Recorded supervision</b>		Regular supervision	Letter sent
<b>9</b>	<i>Reflection in own time</i>	<b>2. Recorded supervision</b>		Regular supervision
<b>10</b>	Regular supervision	<i>Reflection in own time</i>	<b>2. Recorded supervision</b>	
<b>11</b>		Regular supervision	<i>Reflection in own time</i>	<b>2. Recorded supervision</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>2. Research meeting</b>		Regular supervision	<i>Reflection in own time</i>
<b>13</b>	Letter sent	<b>2. Research meeting</b>		Regular supervision
<b>14</b>	Regular supervision	Letter sent	<b>2. Research meeting</b>	
<b>15</b>		Regular supervision	Letter sent	<b>2. Research meeting</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>3. Recorded supervision</b>		Regular supervision	Letter sent
<b>17</b>	<i>Reflection in own time</i>	<b>3. Recorded supervision</b>		Regular supervision
<b>18</b>	Regular supervision	<i>Reflection in own time</i>	<b>3. Recorded supervision</b>	
<b>19</b>		Regular supervision	<i>Reflection in own time</i>	<b>3. Recorded supervision</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>3. Research meeting</b>		Regular supervision	<i>Reflection in own time</i>
<b>21</b>	Letter sent	<b>3. Research meeting</b>		Regular supervision
<b>22</b>	Regular supervision continues	Letter sent	<b>3. Research meeting</b>	
<b>23</b>		Regular supervision continues	Letter sent	<b>3. Research meeting</b>
<b>24</b>			Regular supervision continues	Letter sent
<b>25</b>				Regular supervision continues
<b>30</b>	Final group meeting	Final group meeting	Final group meeting	Final group meeting

## **Methods of analysis**

Although the methods of inquiry that produced the data were familiar practice to me as a narrative practitioner, I was less familiar with methods of analysis. I approached the analysis task with trepidation and uncertainty. Writing research texts in the “midst of uncertainty” comes in part from knowing and caring about the participants and one’s relationship with them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a narrative practitioner, I was accustomed to writing therapeutic letters following counselling conversations, using exact expressions of clients. At first, I thought I might let the participants’ words speak for themselves, without my analysis. Drawing from Lather (2007), I was reluctant to theorise or impose my meaning on the words of the participants. For, as she posed:

Exactly what does it mean for me to come in with my interpretative voice and say what things mean and how can that not be a sort of imposition of somebody else’s framework. (p.28-29)

I then considered writing the data as stories, accurate but embellished stories: not as literal transcripts of dialogue, but as prose or poetry. Research is a creative, discursive process and poetic interpretations of experience have been offered as an analytic form in narrative, re-presentational practices (see for example, Behan, 2003b; K. Crocket, 2010; Pentecost, 2006; Speedy, 2005a). However, data-texts produced through co-inquiry for a doctoral thesis cannot be re-presented as expressions of experience in the way that therapeutic stories might be read. My project’s purpose was also quite different from narrative life-story inquiry where listening to and interpreting persons’ stories are the primary aim of the research inquiry. Without my analysis, this study would not meet the purposes of my inquiry which was to theorise my own practice. I needed my scholarly-self to be present in the analysis of the data as much as my practitioner-self had been present in the production of the data. As I was not a researcher looking at other practitioners’ conversations, I had to find a way of analysing data-texts with enough distance to produce rich analysis while remaining inside the texts.

## **Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis is a contested field with a variety of different approaches to the reading and interpretation of text (Potter, 1997; Potter & Wetherall, 1987;

Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995; Willig, 1999; 2001). The form of discourse analysis I used to analyse data-texts in this study was based loosely on a type of interrogation of text offered by Burman and Parker (1993), Fairclough (1992), and Crocket (2007) which was located in a Foucauldian understanding of discourse as a political activity. This form of discourse analysis was not a neutral process but one that traced between the social practice of supervision and the text that showed that practice in action. I employed an approach to analysis that positioned me, not outside the text, interpreting, and theorising *about* another's practice, but as an insider, actively embodied in the texts. Instead of speculating what participants might be thinking, it is their words, translated into written data-texts that I studied: those conversations and discussions where "images of the mind are reproduced and transformed" (Burman & Parker, 1993, p.2). I analysed language-in-use (Davies et al., 2006), exploring relationships between social practice and the contexts of their moments of creation.

Drawing also from tools of critical reflexivity (Pillow, 2003; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000), I examined how pieces of discourse were producing us in the moment; what position calls were being offered, accepted, or rejected; what were the effects of shifting power relations; and what were the effects of my relational responsiveness (or lack of) for participants. I analysed what was happening in the action of supervision and how my supervision practice shifted in response to the participants' reflections in the research conversations. I looked for places of discursive dissonance that interrupted relational connection. The cyclic research process of action/reflection/action (Schön, 1983) allowed me to analyse moments when my speaking in supervision had not matched my preferred values and hopes for my practice and to bring that learning into future supervision sessions.

While employing the same analytic tools throughout, my analysis in each chapter was tailored to each participant's experiences of supervision and their expressions, that is, to the particular story that emerged from each set of texts. For example, in Chapter 5, I show how my responses were shaped by a feminist understanding of relational ethics as I worked to assist Claire to story her preferred professional identity on less deficit terms. In Chapter 6, I used a discursive positioning lens to notice how particular utterances in supervision

positioned Kay and me in-relation as novice student/expert supervisor. I analysed how the position of research participant invited Kay to take up more agentic speaking positions in the research meetings and in future supervision conversations. In Chapter 7, I was at first challenged to find ways to integrate spiritual narratives into supervision conversation. An ethics of hospitality assisted me to listen closely and understand the importance of Louise's Christian faith to her professional identity. In Chapter 8, I show the work of supervision at the interface of the personal/professional binary. From a narrative understanding of identity as a social and relational achievement, I sought to offer more agentic positions for April to re-position herself and to story preferred accounts of her personal and professional identity.

My approach to analysis was to closely examine how discursive movements were being made in moments of talk. I did not only select exemplar moments of practice. As I have already noted, moments of "emotional disturbances" "agitation", or "perplexity" were considered by Dewey (1997) as the most "authentic" places for practitioners to think about their practice. Therefore, I have chosen to analyse the most perplexing and disturbing moments in supervision, in order to make the discursive struggle I experienced as a supervisor, more transparent.

These are the stories I tell in the following results chapters. "Writing in" my nervousness, ambivalences and doubts (Pinn, 2001, p.186), I do not smooth over moments of discursive dissonance, emotional disturbance, relational tension, or the flaws of ordinary supervision practice. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that part of the narrative inquirer's doubts come from understanding that: "they need to write about persons, places, and things as *becoming* rather than *being*" (p.145). Applying this concept to myself, I make my supervisor and researcher subjectivities visible in the results stories as a *becoming* process.

### **Results stories**

In order to assist readers' understanding of the results stories, in the excerpts from data-texts, I *italicise* the participants' self-reflective questions in their speaking and put my questions in their speaking in **bold** font. For example, on page 82 Claire made the following statement in the first supervision meeting:

**Claire:** I felt that there was some sort of transference going on and I was worried that I was influencing the client with my own story. Inside I was saying to myself, *“Oh god, what kind of counsellor are you, Claire?”*

In the subsequent research meeting, I use standard font, with my supervision questions in Claire’s speaking shown in **bold** font and her questions to herself in *italicised* font. That is, the participants’ own reflections are always represented in *italics*, and mine in **bold**. I use ellipses “...” to indicate pauses in speaking and square brackets to indicate and describe more meaning moments, e.g. [Long pause]. For example:

**Claire:** You asked me questions in supervision, which were really powerful for me and made me think afterwards. For example, **“Is this sharing useful for your client?” “And what are the effects for the client?”** Your questions moved the focus from me thinking *“how am I responding here as the counsellor”* to *“what is happening for the client here?”* *“What’s the bigger picture?”* ...and talking about my own experiences...it moved me to a different place... [Long pause]

In each of the four results stories, I first present selected data-texts from supervision, in order to show practice in action. I show moments of discursive dissonance and my responses that produce discursive shifts, as well as my responses that limit movement. I then offer my analysis of what is happening in those discursive moments through a reflexive commentary. I next present extracts of the reflective/research conversations, which involves first a commentary from the participants on their reflections of supervision, and second, alongside that commentary, I offer my own analysis. Thus, I offer another, further account of what is happening to show the effects of supervision for the participant’s professional practice and identity and for my professional practice and identity.

### **Representational research practices**

In the results-stories, I have focussed on selected aspects of the data-texts which address my research questions. I have written the results stories mindful of the politics of re-presentation, which in a feminist practice are “inextricably linked with issues of ethics” (Ganguly, 1992, p.65). I sought to represent the participants in ways that were congruent and consistent with the actual conversations. Stories

of experience can be told and retold over time, each retelling producing a different version. In that sense, all stories are works of fiction, not the “truth” of an objective reality but contextual and contingent to time and place. Although works of fiction, the results stories that follow will hopefully show narrative coherence and consistency with my research aims and with the ethos of my professional practice. Calling on narrative practices of acknowledgement, I have chosen to include a letter to the research participants to acknowledge their contribution to my research, and to bridge the process of research and the outcomes of research.

### **Narrative practices of acknowledgement**

Narrative practices of acknowledgment, or “taking-it-back practices” (White, 1997, p.202), are those practices which embrace an ethical responsibility to identify and acknowledge the ways in which therapeutic conversations are shaping of a therapist’s work and life. They are practices, spoken or written, which acknowledge the contributions of the person who has sought assistance. “Taking-it-back practices” of inclusion, of sharing the life-shaping nature of therapeutic work, help us to step away from reproducing the “professional gaze” and taking up positions of dominance. In supervision, practices of acknowledgment might include speaking of the mutual learning gained from supervision conversations; how a counsellor’s practices, values or understandings, have resonated and re-affirmed my own; how these new understandings of practice will serve me in working with other counsellors who are experiencing similar practice dilemmas. Working for collaborative practice in supervision, I find acknowledgement practices weave smoothly into supervision conversations.

On narrative terms, practices of acknowledgment are not the same as practices of applause, or affirmation, or congratulation. Instead, acknowledgment includes how our lives have been touched by witnessing the lives of others. In outsider witnessing teams (White, 1995b), a member of the team acknowledges the interconnection between what she has heard and her own life experiences. Witnessing the other might involve acknowledging how parts of that person’s story at the centre of counselling, have resonated, connected, or contributed to her own life. Therapeutic letters are also a form of acknowledgement and serve a particular purpose. Their intention is to invite the reader to take up a reflexive posture and to encourage “a sense of authorship and re-authorship of one’s life

and relationships” (White & Epston, 1990, p.83).

Witnessing and acknowledging a person’s struggles, or victories, or management of life’s dilemmas, can be powerfully affirming and shaping of a person’s life and future action, even outside the therapy context. Weingarten (2009) has written about her experiences of taking narrative practices of acknowledgment and applying them in her everyday life events. She looks for opportunities to acknowledge the small and easily missed moments when she might offer an “incontrovertible observation or an unassailable fact that cannot be deflected by the person whose quality or behaviour is being remarked on” (p.29). For example, telling a person what their action has meant for you, and for your future action.

In the following letter, my intentions are to acknowledge the “unassailable fact” of the contribution each participant has made to my learning. Their participation in this study has touched my life and my professional practice. Without their participation my research journey would not have been possible.

**Dear Claire, Kay, Louise, and April**

It is with appreciation that I acknowledge your participation in my research project. Without your willingness, generosity and trust in my project, I could not have completed this thesis. Motivated as much by a sense of care and obligation to you, as well as to myself, to complete what we started three years ago, has fuelled my motivation at times when energy was ebbing. Steven Gaddis (2002), a narrative practitioner and researcher, proposed that research should serve the interests of those participating in it, as well as the researcher’s interests. My hope for this completed document of the research project is that it makes sense to you and serves the development of your counselling practice, just as your participation in my project has already served the development of my supervision and research practice.

In writing the results stories in this thesis, I took responsibility as researcher for selecting some data and not others and telling stories in ways that addressed my research questions. All stories can be told differently: there could be many versions of the work we did together, depending on who is telling the story. As I tell the stories I am choosing to tell, I recognise that I have not shared these stories prior to submitting my thesis. My hope is that you recognise yourself and our

conversations and also experience something new. From your participation in my study, I have learned that understanding the complexity of difference and finding ways to speak difference is not a simple matter. In other words, understanding is the first step; finding ways to speak difference in relationship where that difference occurs is another. I wish to acknowledge the significant contribution each of you has made to my learning about speaking difference in supervision.

Claire, in our supervision agreement you specifically asked to learn more about Narrative Therapy. Because your interest in narrative practice matched closely with what I had to offer you as a supervisor, our supervision extended your learning of narrative practice and my learning of how to combine the position of teacher and supervisor in supervision. There has been much written about the different roles of teacher, counsellor and consultant in supervision (Bernard, 1979; Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Carroll, 1996). Your request offered me an opportunity to reflect on how I might better assist new counsellors, not familiar with Narrative Therapy, to learn more about narrative approaches and to talk about social constructionist ideas in ways that make sense for them. Thank you for this opportunity your request in supervision offered me.

Kay, as a student counsellor you were conscientious in your approach to your studies and you brought that same commitment to my project. As researcher, I was eager to know how you experienced our different theoretical orientations. In supervision you were positioned as a student “learning your craft”, but in our research meetings you moved into a position of informed counsellor, offering ideas about how supervision could work better for you. Because of your trust and goodwill, our supervisory relationship had the “capacity to engage in respectful and robust inquiry” (Crocket, 2002a, p.162). From your reflections, I have come to appreciate better the complexity of working with students in supervision, when theoretical orientations are different. I have already revisited how I negotiate supervision contracts with new practitioners, particularly students, and I work to establish clear and mutually agreed expectations and outcomes for how we will work together in supervision. Thank you for your candid and helpful reflections in our research conversations, which have informed the information I now give to new counsellors seeking supervision with me, and without which, I may be still



practising in habitual ways.

Louise, working with you in the research project opened up new possibilities for how I might assist practitioners who integrate spirituality into their counselling practice. From listening to your reflections on our supervision, I learned ways that I might become less certain of my professional knowing and more connected to your knowing, especially about spiritual matters. Just as Melissa Griffith (1995) suggested it was a therapist's certainty "that oppresses and constrains opportunities to hear the story as the client experiences it" (p.123), in supervision it is a supervisor's certainty that opens up or closes down space for a practitioner to speak about their understandings of practice. Our supervision and reflection conversations assisted me to move between the interface of spirituality and professional practice and to develop an ethic of hospitality for lived experiences that were unfamiliar to me. As a result, I feel more prepared to be less certain in supervision and more trusting in the process of inquiry. I have since had the opportunity to use this learning in other conversations where spirituality featured and I noticed that curiosity and inquiry were more present to me than in the past. Thank you for your contribution to this development.

April, I was encouraged to hear from you that you experienced our supervision as "stretching you a bit" and I want to acknowledge that our conversations stretched me too! From your reflections on our supervision, I continued to learn more about how our personal and professional identities are constructed in and through the discourses that are available to us. The power of pathologising discourses and the work they do in constructing debilitating stories of self are freely accessible for us all. For example, in supervision we spent time discussing how as practitioners, we are not immune to the same dominant discourses that circulate in society and construct clients' negative identities. As a student counsellor, you were concerned that you needed to have yourself fully sorted before you could work with clients. Your willingness to challenge these ideas in supervision impressed me and it was a privilege for me to witness how you produced yourself differently. In your words, you experienced a sense of "taking your power back". Your reflections and experiences have encouraged me to continue to story personal narratives in supervision, alongside the stories of professional identity.

Finally to you all, the results stories that I tell in my thesis leave much unsaid, uncertain, and incomplete, for to tell the whole story of our working together would be impossible, assuming there is a “whole” story to tell. These stories are already out of date as none of us are the same as we were then. I have tried to represent our work in ways that echo the richness of our supervision and research conversations. What are invisible from the results chapters are the sounds of laughter, the moments of sadness, and the embodied meaningfulness of the shared learning produced by our conversations. My hope is that my meaning-making of selected data will also be meaningful for you, and offer you new insights of the work we did together in this project, just as you offered me insights for my supervision and research practice.

In appreciation and acknowledgement,

Ireni

## **Chapter 5: Towards a re-authoring of professional identity**

I want to learn more about Narrative Therapy and I want that to be in our contract this year. I want you to explain the differences between how I am practising and a narrative perspective. I want you to suggest reading because I'm still learning and I know it's a life-long thing...but the ideas seem to make so much sense to me and fit with my own philosophy and how I think about life. (Claire, see page 65)

### **Introduction**

This first results chapter explores how a narrative teaching focus in supervision assisted Claire to work towards a re-authoring of her professional identity. Claire, a newly qualified counsellor, had attended the Narrative Therapy course I taught in her training programme. Claire had expressed that a narrative, non-pathologising approach resonated with her personal values and her preferred ways of working with people. She made a clear request for a teaching focus in supervision when we established our supervision contract. Moments of discursive dissonance still arose for us however, in spite of having named our theoretical differences and having a clear agreement for a narrative focus.

I offer two episodes of discursive dissonance in this chapter. The first vignette illustrates dialogical moments where I “trouble” Claire’s story of a practice event as transgressive self-disclosure. As I worked to make other accounts available, Claire storied her practice on the terms of a feminist ethics of care. In the second episode of dissonance, I sought to bring into view the poststructuralist concepts of knowledge and power, by deconstructing the use of “challenging practices” in counselling. In doing so, I found myself reproducing, in supervision, the practices of power that in Claire’s counselling session I was trying to make visible. This episode of practice highlights the capillary workings of power-in-relation through language.

In the third episode, Claire offers reflections on the usefulness of video-taping supervision for review. One of the unexpected results from the research project

was the positive experiences reported by the participants of watching themselves on the DVD. In Chapter 9, I discuss the implications of video-taping supervision for the development of practice.

### **Supervision 1: From transgressive self-disclosure to feminist ethics of care**

In this first episode, Claire had brought to supervision her concerns about a practice event with Peta, her client, who had left an abusive relationship and was living elsewhere with little financial support. Peta's partner had allegedly shown remorse and he wanted her to return. As Peta was struggling financially, and worrying about her children when they went to visit their father, she had considered returning to the family home, and had brought her dilemma to counselling. Because Peta's experience resonated closely to a similar experience in Claire's life, Claire had shared with Peta that she had returned to an abusive relationship and it had been "a backward step". In the following excerpt, Claire expresses to me her worry that she may have "over-disclosed" and describes "feeling guilty" that she had revealed this personal event to her client. Claire was now questioning the ethics and appropriateness of her self-disclosure.

**Claire:** I worry that I may have over-disclosed. I felt that there was some sort of transference going on and I was worried that I was influencing the client with my own story. Inside, I was saying to myself, "*Oh god, what kind of counsellor are you, Claire?*" What I want to look at in supervision today is: was it alright to be feeling sadness for me as well as for the client and did I ask too many questions? Was I directing her too much? Was I pushing her in a certain direction?

Measured against traditional discourses of counsellor objectivity, neutrality and transference dynamics (Bloomington & Mennuti, 2009)—discourses from which Claire had made meaning of this practice event—her self-disclosure might be considered problematic. On hearing Claire's reflexive inquiry, "Oh god, what kind of counsellor are you, Claire?" I wanted to assist Claire to answer her question from a range of discursive options, not only from her familiar transference discourse.

**Ireni:** Can you tell me more about what was going on in the session for you Claire?

**Claire:** I was stuck between my feelings in the session, and how the counselling was going for my client... [Pause]

**Ireni:** Can I ask you more questions about that?

**Claire:** Sure...

**Ireni:** So what do you think the stuckness was about?

Externalising language introduces a “different way of speaking and thinking about that which is problematic...” (White, 1995a, p.41). Through the use of externalising language, that is, changing Claire’s internalised expression, “I was stuck” to “the stuckness”, I hoped to introduce a different way of speaking and thinking about the problematic in Claire’s description of her practice. My inquiry had invited Claire to move into a reflexive position.

**Claire:** The stuckness was about wondering how to respond. I had already decided that she was making a mistake....I was thinking... *“this is really hard for her, what a shame she has to go back to him”* ...I was having an argument with myself... *“Maybe not, maybe they will work things out...and “I should be finding out what she wants to do and be supporting her”*...

**Ireni:** And how did you address this inner conversation?

**Claire:** Well, I addressed it in two ways. I pacified it in my head, and then I decided to tell the client what was happening for me. What I think I should have done was get myself together more quickly than I did. But I felt a huge sadness for myself and for the client, going through the same as me.

In Claire’s expressions “I should have got myself together more quickly” and “I felt a huge sadness for myself and for the client”, I heard her positioned between measurements of counsellor objectivity and neutrality and ethics of care and compassion. In this moment, I was witnessing Claire struggling to negotiate her professional identity amongst competing accounts of practice.

### **The professional is personal**

Privileging professional, objective experience over subjective, lived experience has been “troubled” by feminist theory. Feminist therapists and theorists have long argued that the separation between personal and professional subjectivity is a social construction (Oakley, 1981, 1999; Roberts, 1981; Weingarten, 1991; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995). In narrative practice, personal experiences of a practitioner are considered rich resources for professional story development (White, 1997).

From a feminist perspective, Claire’s personal disclosure might be viewed as bringing her own voice into the “dialogical mix” in ways that did not keep her thinking “private, preferred, and privileged” (Weingarten, 1998, p.7). Through the lens of a feminist analysis, I understood Claire was taking a position as “an insider of the experience” (Reinharz, 1992, p.260). For Reinharz, a feminist researcher, an “epistemology of insiderness” as a way of thinking about life and work as intertwined, enables a researcher to understand what “women have to say in a way no outsider would” (p.260). I am not suggesting that any self-disclosure is inevitably ethical but in this instance I considered that Claire’s personal disclosure could be understood as an ethical act; one that supported Peta in telling her own story of abuse. Claire was positioning herself, not as a professional expert, but as a woman sharing common ground with another. From this discursive frame, I understood Claire’s practice to be located within a feminist ethics of care and solidarity (Gilligan, 1982; Gray, 2004; Larrabee, 1993; Paton, 2003).

Hearing Claire express how distressed she felt in the counselling event, my next inquiry sought to create space for Claire to speak to her personal responses.

**Ireni:** So what was happening for you, Claire, as you witnessed Peta’s story?

Claire’s response to my inquiry takes me on to the next theoretical point I wish to make.

## Witnessing practices

My inquiry was shaped by my understanding of witnessing theory (Weingarten, 2000; 2003). I wanted to acknowledge Claire and her feelings of “huge sadness” while seeking to extend her counselling practice. Claire was not familiar with narrative witnessing practices but by using the word “witnessed” in my utterance, I hoped to demonstrate the agentic positioning offered by witnessing theory as well as invite Claire to speak about the personal effects of witnessing her client’s story.

**Claire:** I was so upset because I didn’t want Peta to fall into the same trap as me...I wanted her to be aware of what the trap could be and so I asked her, *“I would like to share what I am thinking right now, was that alright?”* She said “yes.” So I told her about the time I returned to my husband...it was a backward step and it took so long to get my life back. And then I asked Peta what returning to her husband would be like for her. She said she really has no option but to return to her husband. She doesn’t have the resources to leave him. I was feeling really sorry for her...and I was feeling a bit angry, too [with the situation].

As I witnessed Claire, simultaneously witnessing herself and witnessing her client, I wondered how I might assist her to story a richer account of her practice. Claire had actively witnessed Peta’s distress by intentionally positioning herself alongside Peta, by acknowledging the painful dilemma she faced, and by briefly sharing her own personal experience. In doing so, Claire had enacted practices of compassionate witnessing (Weingarten, 2003). I sought to validate Claire’s decision to disclose personal information, for I considered that in recognising and expressing a common bond with Peta, Claire, as counsellor, was placing herself within the social discourses that affect clients. In this moment of re-telling and remembering the story of this practice event, Claire was visibly emotionally distressed.

From the many possible storylines available in Claire’s utterance, I decided to pick up her expression of anger. A shift in positioning requires “listening at the level of the word to the possibilities for a story to pivot at any point” (Weingarten, 1998, p.3). Weingarten called listening this way, “radical listening” where the

practitioner listens for the discourses shaping the stories a person brings to counselling. I considered Claire's words, "I was feeling a bit angry, too" might provide a possible shift in her account of her practice as transgressive.

**Ireni:** What was the anger about, Claire?

**Claire:** I was thinking... *"Here's another woman having to go through this and return to an abusive partner because there is no alternative"*...I was feeling really sad for myself, for her, and for all the woman and children who do not have enough resources.

**Ireni:** So you recognised your own experience in her story and it brought back huge memories for you on a personal level. You also felt a sense of injustice that she had nowhere else to go. Can we talk about that some more?

In my reflective summary above, I offered Claire an alternative position from which to review her practice, a subject position located within discourses of a feminist ethics of care and social justice. Listening for an entry point into another possible storyline, among the myriad of expressions uttered in a conversation, is a central narrative practice, which brings me to my next theoretical discussion.

### **Double listening: Listening for the absent but implicit**

As discussed in Chapter 3, Derrida (1978) proposed that every expression, spoken or written, contains both its own meaning and its opposite or another meaning. White (1997) theorised the "absent but implicit" in a person's speaking, as a posture of double-listening to the hidden meanings, or contradictions in a person's expression, which can lead to rich story development of obscured stories of experience and identity. For example, when I asked Claire, "what was the anger about?" I was noticing what White (2007) referred to as "out-of-phase aspects" (p.219) that is, other aspects of Claire's experience that did not fit into a story of her practice as transgressive self-disclosure.

In Claire's expressions: "I was feeling really sad for myself, for her, and for all the woman and children who do not have enough resources", I heard an expression shaped by the values of care, compassion, and fairness that were precious to Claire and gave meaning to her life. Absent but implicit in Claire's



expressions were ethics of fairness and values of social justice—values which had drawn Claire towards Narrative Therapy. These expressions had been obscured in Claire’s first account of her practice by concepts of counsellor neutrality, objectivity, and transference.

### **Storying a political practice**

As we continued supervision, I asked Claire questions about the history of these social justice values. Claire spoke about her own experiences of growing up with limited resources in a working class family, of her struggles and disappointments in relationships, and the difficulties of single parenthood. She spoke of her desire to help others as she had been helped in her life, of her stance for social justice and fairness that came from her spiritual beliefs. By listening carefully and by shaping my questions intentionally, the idea of therapy as a socio-political conversation (Monk & Gehart, 2003) had become available to our supervision conversation. Socio-political discourses, present in Claire’s responses at the time of the counselling, were absent in the story of her practice as transgressive self-disclosure. Located within a discourse of social justice, my response called Claire into a different position within a different discourse; a position from which she could story herself as a different kind of counsellor. I had assisted Claire to re-author herself as a more agentic counsellor in relation to her social values, spiritual beliefs and commitments to her clients. Claire’s stance for relationships free from violence and abuse; her belief in fairness of family resources; and her desire to develop appreciative practices of self-witnessing in her counselling work became resources that she could now call on in her future counselling practice.

### **Changing discourse: Changing subject**

Near the end of this re-authoring conversation, I invited Claire to reconsider the reflexive question she reported having asked herself following the counselling session with Peta:

**Ireni:** At the beginning of this conversation, Claire, you said you had asked yourself “*what sort of a counsellor are you?*” How would you answer that question now?

**Claire:** I think I am the sort of counsellor who cares deeply for people. I want to help people because I have been helped in my life and if I can use

my own experiences in some way then that's good.

Together, through a process of narrative inquiry we had scaffolded a richer story of Claire's professional identity; an identity which connected her counselling practices with her values and commitments for living.

### **Positioning the personal in professional practice**

Stepping into a teaching position, I now raised questions about how counsellors might bring aspects of their lived experience into their practice in ways that keep clients centred in counselling conversations. As we pondered the personal/professional construct, I shared with Claire some reflective questions that I considered in my own practice.

**Ireni:** I ask myself, "*is this sharing useful for the client?*" "*What might the effects be for the client?*" Because, I need to be mindful of the power relations in counselling and I think that calls me to choose my personal disclosures carefully. I say to myself: "*will sharing my experience strengthen a client's story?*" And I might follow up a personal response by asking a client, "*does what I am saying relate for you or not?*" "*In what way does that relate for you?*" "*What might be a next step you could take from here?*" Because, I want to refocus the conversation back onto the client and not centre my experiences in the conversation.

There is a strong commitment in feminist and narrative practice of working with disenfranchised persons, families, and communities to address issues of homelessness, trauma, gender discrimination, and socio-economic disadvantage (Denborough, 2008; Fraenkel, Hameline, & Shannon, 2009; Madsen, 2007; Monk & Gehart, 2003; Weingarten, 2010). As part of our shared supervision agreement noted at the beginning of this chapter, I suggested reading that Claire might find helpful around the idea that therapy is a socio/political conversation, and ideas of compassionate witnessing practices, for example, Hare-Mustin (1994), Monk and Gehart (2003), Russell and Carey (2003), Sinclair (2007), White (1997) and Weingarten (2000; 2003; 2009).

## Research Meeting 1: Reflections on supervision

I now turn to the reflective/research meeting one month after this re-authoring conversation in supervision. I was eager to hear Claire's reflections on our discussion. I asked Claire what she noticed as she reviewed the DVD of our supervision conversation.

**Claire:** What I notice about our supervision is when I think I've made a mistake and I bring it to you, you very gently use it as a teaching thing and always make me feel that I've learnt something. For example, the piece when I felt that there was that sort of transference going on and I was worried that I was influencing the client with my own story. When I brought it to supervision, we went through it; we really explored it and I ended up feeling that I had learnt something. When I look back now, the feminist part of me was really strong and we have talked about that in [other] supervision.

Speaking from normative and developmental discourses of supervisor-as-teacher and practitioner-as-learner, Claire first positioned herself as a practitioner who "thinks I've made a mistake". The relations of power in this moment produced us in a right/wrong discourse, with me being produced as a teacher who "makes" Claire feel better. While supervision is hierarchical, it does not have to be authoritarian. Claire was subjecting herself and being subjected to a discourse of learner in order to become a more competent counsellor.

Thus, in this particular dialogical moment, Claire was enacting what Foucault (1977) referred to as technologies of the self, in particular, a process of submission and mastery. Producing ourselves as subjects we are also subjected to others. In theorising about a position of submission from a poststructural perspective, Davies (2006) wrote: "at the heart of becoming a subject is the ambivalence of mastery and submission, which, paradoxically, take place simultaneously—not in separate acts, but together in the same moment" (p.426). In this moment, as if hearing herself positioned submissively in this discourse, Claire shifted to a more agentic position and described the dialogic process as one of collaboration: "*we* went through it; *we* really explored it". In Claire's

expressions, I heard a shift in the “discursive register” (Gergen, 2001, p.19) from submission toward a more collaborative position.

In our regular supervision, which followed two weeks from the recorded supervision and was not part of this research inquiry, Claire had talked more about the “feminist part” of her identity, first witnessed in supervision in the story of her work with Peta. From a feminist discourse, I had described Claire’s actions as appreciative self-witnessing: a position that had opened up alternative identity claims that had continued to shape her on-going practice and professional identity. How I responded to Claire at this moment of subjectification would determine the kind of subjectivity Claire developed. Keeping the focus on Claire as a storying subject, I asked:

**Ireni:** Can you be a bit more specific Claire about what helped you to feel that you had learnt something?

**Claire:** You asked me questions in supervision, which were really powerful for me and made me think afterwards. For example, **“Is this sharing useful for your client?” “And what are the effects for the client?”** Your questions moved the focus from me thinking *“how am I responding here as the counsellor”* to *“what is happening for the client here?”* *“What’s the bigger picture?”* ...and talking about my own experiences...it moved me to a different place...

Sharing my reflexive inquiry in supervision had assisted Claire to move from a centred position (what is happening for me) to a more decentred position (what is happening for the client). Claire reflected that my questions were “really powerful” and had moved her to a different place. Our discussion had transported Claire to a place where she could bring her commitments, values, and personal experiences into her professional practice.

### **Transporting moments**

As previously discussed, movements in identity can occur in everyday moments of talk. The excerpts of data-text offered in this first episode of supervision are illustrative snapshots of particular moments towards a re-authoring of professional identity. It is not possible to change a whole discourse in one supervision

conversation but from a poststructural perspective, even small shifts in identity are possible. The small, discursive “mo(ve)ments” (Davies et al., 2006) illustrated in Claire’s words show the possibilities for re-authoring professional identity through a conversation located in feminist ethics of care and narrative witnessing practices. In order to sustain these shifts in her professional identity, Claire would need a sympathetic audience to witness her performance of preferred self.

When Claire asked herself at the beginning of supervision “*what sort of counsellor are you, Claire?*” I had listened at the “level of the word” (Weingarten, 1998), a narrative discursive strategy designed to locate entry points for alternative storying. My responses to Claire’s story of her practice as transgressive self-disclosure, from a narrative, social-political perspective, had created space for possible movement on Claire’s part. Making other discourses available in supervision offered Claire more speaking positions from which she could story a preferred account of her practice and her professional identity.

I now offer a second episode of a moment in supervision where I attempted to trouble the use of the term “challenging” as a practice of confronting clients in counselling. I again present data-excerpts from supervision accompanied by a reflexive analysis, which is then followed by data-excerpts from the subsequent research meeting.

## **Supervision 2: Deconstructing challenging practices**

Reviewing her work with Dana, her client, in this second recorded supervision session, Claire reported that little progress was being made in counselling and she, Claire, was “feeling frustrated”. Claire reported that Dana had come to counselling, after affecting little change in her life on her own, in the hope that she would find relief from the depressive symptoms that were keeping her from enjoying life. Although there had been a number of serious events in Dana’s life which had “brought her life to a standstill”, these had occurred several years ago, and Claire was finding it difficult in counselling to re-kindle a sense of progress. Claire was wondering if Dana was reluctant to make changes in her life and wondered if she should be “challenging” Dana more.

**Claire:** As I’ve told you...I have been seeing Dana for some time now and

progress is very slow...it's as if she is reluctant to make changes.....she says she wants to make changes but I don't think she does... [Claire speaks to the lack of progress]...I don't know if I should be challenging her more... [Pause]

**Ireni:** Can I just stop you there a minute, Claire, and explore that idea of challenging clients?

### **The politics of client practice**

When I heard the word “challenging”, I perceived it to mean the practice of confronting. That Claire might confront her client over lack of progress transported me to the many instances where I had witnessed practitioners abusing the power relation in therapy by using challenging and confronting practices. I am not suggesting that I would not use the power relation to challenge abusive or unethical practices. In this dialogical moment, I was more present to the notion of using challenging practices in counselling because “progress is very slow”. I wanted to explore with Claire how she had come to make this knowledge claim, and how else might she understand the client's situation. However, Claire's response to my interjection both surprised and disturbed me:

**Claire:** Oh, don't you use challenging in your practice? I would want you to challenge me if you thought I was doing something wrong... [Laughter]

My invitation to explore the “idea of challenging” had produced a fissure in our conversation, obscured in Claire's laughter but present in her words. Claire's words had positioned me as a supervisor who might not “challenge” a practitioner if they were “doing something wrong”. I heard Claire speaking again from a discourse of self-in error or wrongdoing: a counsellor who might need correction from and protection by her supervisor. While it is a valid assumption to expect a supervisor to take action if a practitioner is practising unethically, I felt uncomfortable being positioned in a discourse of supervision as correction. This discursive rupture had transported us into a different discourse and repositioned us in a different relational space. We had moved from a focus on Claire's practice event to a focus on my supervision practice. I felt my supervision practice was under scrutiny from Claire's “challenge” to me and my immediate reaction was to give an account or explanation for my supervision practice.

## **The politics of supervision practice**

How I chose to respond to Claire's speaking in this moment could open up or close down possibilities for discursive movement. Conditions for movement exist in moments when our habitual ways of thinking are dislodged (Davies, et al., 2006). In this moment of discursive contestation and relational instability, alternative possibilities for both our thinking and action might emerge. However, I was not sure how to respond to Claire's direct question for I felt caught between explaining my understanding of "challenging practices" and defending my position as a supervisor who would address unethical practice. In my attempt to move away from this moment of discomfort, I replied to Claire's inquiry with humour.

**Ireni:** Well, I think we've all been challenged enough in our lives and we don't need any more from our counsellor or supervisor! [Shared laughter]

In my response, I was speaking from intertextual moments unknown to Claire. In my reply were echoes of Michael White's words, spoken at conferences and workshops, where he claimed that people who attend therapy had often experienced too many challenges in their lives and did not require more from a therapist. I was speaking from a "corridor of voices" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.293) where meaning is layered upon meaning and voice spoken upon voice. My utterance was "saturated" with other texts not available to Claire. To paraphrase Bakhtin (1986) my utterance would only become my own when it contained my intentions, my accent, my expressions and my adaptations. I had not re-worked or re-accentuated White's expression with my own evaluative tone and personal, contextual meanings. Therefore, my intentions in the words I offered Claire were not clearly visible. On later reflection, I recognised that my use of the power relation was invisible to me at this time. In my response, I had subverted the positioning Claire had offered me to account for my practice, and I had determined what might be spoken and who might speak.

In order to step back from this moment of disturbance, I re-positioned myself as an inquirer. I invited Claire to explore her understanding of the word "challenge" by asking a landscape of meaning question.

**Ireni:** What does the concept of “challenge” mean for you Claire?

**Claire:** Sometimes, it’s when I ask clients questions that are a bit hard, or uncomfortable...I believe that my main job as a counsellor is to provide a place where people can talk about anything...I have no judgement, but a caring for them, and maybe challenging them a bit for their own sake... What do you do?

Listening to Claire’s words, I understood her to be positioned between conflicting discourses—unconditional regard and non-judgement, and a knowing when clients need to be “challenged”. I did not expose these sub-textual contradictions; instead, I offered my practice preference as one of inquiry.

**Ireni:** Well, I don’t like the idea of “challenging” in the traditional sense; I prefer the idea of exploring with clients ... asking their permission to explore *with* them rather than assume I know the best direction *for* them. What do you think?

**Claire:** Yes, I like the idea of exploring...

As we continued to discuss differences between challenging and exploring, I pointed to the different relational postures of *knowing-about* and *knowing-with*. The former position suggests a practitioner knows more about clients than they know about themselves, while the other suggests a more collaborative position. Our discussion brought to the surface memories from Claire’s past personal therapy.

**Claire:** My experience of personal counselling in the past was one of challenging...I was asked “oh, do you need more attention for yourself?”...all that challenging stuff...and it made me feel bad, you know...but the counselling we’re doing here, it’s not about blame or accusation, is it?

**Ireni:** No...in narrative practice, a counsellor doesn’t interpret behaviour as an indication that a client is “needing more attention” ...or needs “challenging” about a particular behaviour.

**Claire:** I like that, because when I use the word “challenging” I feel like it is a fighting position...I feel I am standing up to a person, making them do



something...

Claire's embodied response had linked her own lived experiences as a client, to the ideas under review, and she had made her own connections to relations of power when enacting challenging counselling practices. In the following section, I present selected data-excerpts from the second reflective/research meeting where this conversation was re-visited.

## **Research Meeting 2: Reflections on supervision**

I started this meeting by inviting Claire to reflect on points of interest that stood out for her in our supervision.

**Claire:** I have written down quite a few things...one thing is the use of terminology. We had that discussion about “challenging” and “exploration”...and when I watched it [DVD] again...that really stood out for me. It was very important for me.

**Ireni:** So why was that part of our discussion important for you, Claire, can you say a bit more about that?

**Claire:** It was important because it made me look at that part of counselling which I was calling “challenging” and it really pointed out the difference. Sometimes I think I have been challenging rather than exploring and I want to explore more than challenge. So that really, really helped me and since the last time I saw you that is what I have been doing more in my counselling. Because when I’m challenging, I’ve got an idea in my head and it’s nearly always directing, whereas if I am exploring with a client I haven’t a clue what the answer is—it’s the client who will come up with the answer.

Claire had continued to reflect on her practice of challenging clients and through our mutual inquiry in supervision, had taken up new possibilities for her practice. In her speaking, I heard Claire authenticating herself as a counsellor who did not want to take up a position as a counsellor who “directs”. Her expression “it’s the client who will come up with the answer” reflects a counsellor moving between a Person-Centred practice and a narrative practice.

**Ireni:** Well, that's good for me to know Claire. Do you think teasing out, or in narrative terms, deconstructing words and meanings, has that helped you to...I guess...reposition yourself?

**Claire:** Yes, that's a good word, reposition myself.

Although I use the term deconstructing in the above text, I had not fully deconstructed or put the word challenge under erasure. Instead, I had explored, or teased out local and particular knowledges which Claire had drawn from her experiences as a client. As a result of our supervision conversation, and from watching the DVD of supervision, Claire had reflected on the difference between challenging and exploring practices and had repositioned herself as a counsellor who wants to “explore” alongside clients.

My reflections on this episode of supervision practice had also invited me to reconsider my position as supervisor. As researcher in this reflective research meeting, I wanted to unpack the expression Claire used in supervision: “I would want you to challenge me if you thought I was doing something wrong”.

**Ireni:** Have you thought more about the idea of being “challenged” by me in supervision, Claire?

**Claire:** Yes, I think you challenge me by asking questions...You don't answer my questions straight away but offer probing questions back to me...I don't get the answer on a plate from you. I don't learn the same way if I haven't worked through it myself. So I really like that...it makes me work, and think about it, and that's challenging...but I find out I have got the answer myself. That is something that I have learnt from you and from Narrative Therapy too, and I use it with my clients, to ask questions... I think it is a very, very powerful thing to do. It makes me feel powerful. Powerful isn't exactly the right word...more confident in myself...I don't have to have the answers.

Claire words affirmed for me that deconstructive inquiry produces very powerful outcomes in therapeutic conversations (Winslade, 2005). In her speaking, Claire was naming herself as “powerful”, then, as if hearing how those words constituted her in particular ways, she changed her expression to feeling “*more confident in*

*myself*". By recognising the discourses through which she was being constituted and by moving from one discursive position to another, Claire was exercising agency. In her speaking, I witnessed Claire performing and authenticating her professional identity on terms more aligned with her personal philosophy, values, and beliefs. I also understood Claire's experience of my inquiry in supervision as a challenging practice on my part, one that extended and expanded her practice. Through her speaking, Claire was authenticating me as a supervisor who challenges, not in terms of wrongdoing, but in terms of my preferred practice of deconstructive inquiry. I was interested in hearing more about how Claire viewed the monitoring aspect of supervision.

**Ireni:** In supervision, I had asked you: **"what do you think I would tell you off about?"** And I was wondering...how does supervision position us, so that you think you might get told off?

**Claire:** Well, I saw the supervisor as the authority ... it is some hang-up from childhood about authority, you know, "I don't want to get into trouble"...I used to see a supervisor as responsible for making sure I am capable of practising safely, and I want that...I want to be as safe as I can and do my best for my clients...but instead of seeing it [supervision] as getting crosses when you do something wrong, I am seeing it now more like a caring relationship where the supervisor wants you to do your best and uses examples to teach... Does that make sense?

In this research conversation, Claire was repositioning herself in relation to me as her supervisor. Supervision had become a more fluid relational space where normative positioning of supervisor-as-expert and practitioner-as-learner had been disturbed.

### **Use of video-taping as review of supervision**

Claire's inquiry, "does this make sense?" featured often in our supervision conversations. In our supervision agreement, Claire had wanted to use supervision to assist her to summarise her practice concerns more concisely, and to articulate her practice more fluently. In my reply, I asked Claire if she noticed supervision helping her with this goal.

**Claire:** Yes, because I wanted to improve the way I express my ideas and learn to be more concise and by watching myself [on the DVD] I can see if I am doing that...I wasn't expecting that to come out of the research, so that's good. Actually, I think taping supervision is a good idea because I can see myself speaking, and ... it's very different, being an observer...

For Claire, witnessing herself on the DVD had powerful transformative and transporting effects. Hearing herself talk about her practice, observing the moments of discursive movements, and witnessing her counsellor-self moving towards her preferred identity, produced further learning and development of her practice. Positioned as collaborative co-inquirer in supervision and in the research, Claire enacted her own “reflexivities of discomfort” (Pillow, 2003) when witnessing-self as part of the research project. I now offer a discussion on both episodes of supervision practice presented in this chapter.

## **Discussion of this chapter**

### **Psychodynamic transferential discourses**

In the first episode of supervision practice, I showed how a story of transgressive self-disclosure was re-storied on the terms of a feminist ethics of care. As discussed in Chapter 2, supervision, having evolved from psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic models of therapy training, maintains a special emphasis on therapist-client interaction, particularly transferential and countertransferential features (Feltham, 2000). Therefore, it was understandable that concepts of transference had shaped Claire's interpretation of her practice. On psychodynamic terms, transference describes a client's feelings for a therapist and countertransference describes a therapist's emotional response to a client's feelings (Bloomington & Mennuti, 2009). The psychodynamic therapies view transference as a client's attempts to build a closer relationship with a therapist and therapists are advised to take “a position of ‘abstinence’ by not gratifying clients in their efforts to get closer to the therapist” (Tune, 2008, p.258).

However, Claire did not report her client “trying to get closer” to her. Rather, Claire's own feelings and memories were being triggered by similarities in the client's story. A psychodynamic supervisor may have focussed on Claire's

“countertransference”. She may have considered how Claire’s emotions might be used therapeutically in the client/therapist relationship. If a therapist brings issues of countertransference to supervision, a supervisor, according to Symons (2008), should engage them in a rigorous self-reflection, offer robust supervision, and encourage the counsellor to attend personal therapy. Symons argued that these measures are deemed necessary in order to minimise risk to a client and “maximise the therapeutic potential of utilising countertransference” (p.254).

Thus, transferential discourse produces particular therapeutic practices and particular professional identities. In Claire’s self-reflections, ideas of transference had produced her professional identity as in-error. By re-connecting Claire with her feminist and social justice values through a re-authoring conversation, I had offered her assistance to move from deficit narratives of professional identity and into a territory where local and contextual knowledges are valued. Re-valuing her commitments to feminist ethics of care, fairness and social justice, Claire had storied a richer practice account and a more preferred professional identity.

### **Discourse of self-disclosure**

There is no clear position in traditional counselling literature on whether therapists’ self-disclosure is a “therapeutic technique or a therapeutic mistake” (Hansen, 2005, p.96). Person-Centred therapy regards the use of personal information as therapeutic, depending on the skill and experience of the therapist (see for example, Dryden & Reeves, 2008; Mearns & Thorne, 2007; Watkins, 1990; Wosket, 1999). In one study (Audet & Everall, 2003), clients identified both helpful and hindering effects of their counsellor’s self-disclosure. Jean Hansen’s (2005) study showed that personal disclosures from therapists were more than twice as likely to be experienced by clients as helpful, and non-disclosures were twice as likely to be unhelpful. Although the practice of self-disclosure has been defined in discrepant ways in the literature, Gerald Corey (2009) maintained that if counsellors modelled “realness” by engaging in appropriate self-disclosure, then clients would “tend to be honest with them in the therapeutic relationship” (p.17). I viewed Claire’s distress in relation to the practice event as being produced by conflicting ethics of practice, rather than, as she had described it, by poor boundary maintenance.

### **Feminist and narrative practices of self-witnessing**

In narrative practice, a therapist's embodied response can add richness and depth to a client's story. White (1997) claimed that when used appropriately, embodied responses "undermine the rigidity of the power relation" (p.131). Weingarten (1998) positions herself as a participant in a therapeutic conversation, and describes a sense of freedom to "fully inhabit", or "situate" (p.5) her responses as she connects her life experiences to the life experiences of a client. In feminist practice, Claire's personal disclosure might be considered a political act against masculinist notions of objectivity, reason, neutrality and expertise (Widdicombe, 1995; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995). Many feminist researchers consider that revealing personal information puts clients at ease and helps them to find common ground in professional relationships (Sax, 2007; Oakley, 1999). Personal or embodied responses, as deliberate acts of collaboration, work to interrupt "presumptive power relations" (Sax, 2007, p.80). For some feminist therapists, personal disclosure is considered a contradiction to dominant professional discourses of objectivity and expertism. Miriam Greenspan (1995) a feminist psychotherapist, valued her self-disclosure as an ability to connect with clients. She described her use of the "art of self-disclosure" as "my gifts in breaking down the wall of separation between Patient and Expert..." (p.239).

### **Challenging "challenging practices"**

Claire's use of challenging as a counselling practice had been informed by traditional counselling discourses. Skills of challenging or confronting, according to Ivey and Katz (1977) are practices that help clients clarify and resolve "discrepancies and incongruities in their behavior, thoughts, and attitudes" (p.486). As advanced counselling skills, these practices "successfully challenge and confront uncooperative clients" (Egan, 2001, p.215), or might be called on when working with "difficult" or "hostile" clients (Corey, 2009, p.334). The language of challenge and internalised client descriptors such as "reluctant and resistant" (Egan, 2001, p.162) and manipulative and controlling (Kottler, 1992) illustrate the power/knowledge relation. From these frameworks, the power of naming, diagnosing, or making knowledge claims about clients, positions therapists more powerfully in relation to clients.

Therapy attempts to make visible. Contestation over meaning can be viewed as a struggle for dominance (Winslade & Monk, 2008). The operations of power can be observed in this instance on two levels. First, in the counselling relationship, enacting the idea that a client “needs challenging” when claiming a desire for change yet lacking progress, a counsellor takes up a position as expert. That counsellors can first identify discrepancies in clients’ behaviour, and take up authority to diagnose and name what those discrepancies are, are issues of power. I sought to disturb this positioning by making visible the power relations at work. Secondly, by doing so, I entered a struggle over the meaning of “challenging”. By pointing to the workings of power in the counselling relationship, I was inadvertently using practices of power in the supervisory relationship. Power struggles are present in everyday conversation as well as in supervision but as supervisor I am entrusted with authority. It is the recognition of the use of authority that I draw attention to here.

From a Narrative Therapy perspective, contestation or challenging practices are acts of power, used in particular therapeutic contexts where acts of violence or abuse need to be confronted. This particular disruption illustrates how I used my authority as supervisor to trouble the meaning of Claire’s term “challenging”. On a theoretical level, it illustrates the different ways Claire and I understood the production of knowledge. Although I used the term deconstruction in the research meeting, I had not fully deconstructed the word “challenge” in a Derridean sense for I still want to use the word “challenge” contextually, in the sense of confronting, when appropriate. As already noted, following St Pierre (1997) I want to both use and reject the categories/language available to me and not be limited to a fixed, absolute meaning.

### **The work of this chapter**

This chapter explored two particular moments of discursive dissonance produced at the confluence of different theoretical orientations. In the first episode of practice, a re-authoring conversation illustrated shifts in discursive positioning made possible through witnessing practices, connecting personal and professional narratives, and listening closely to the absent but implicit values of care and social justice. The second episode illustrated the power/knowledge relation at work in

both counselling practice and supervision practice. This chapter demonstrated social constructionist theory at work in the dialogic, relational production of knowledge in both supervision and research conversations. In these ways, more satisfying responses, relational connection, and shared meaning were achieved in moments of discursive dissonance. The next results story shows how different theoretical orientations and expectations of supervision produced more problematic discursive dissonance and relational dislocation in a training supervision.



## **Chapter 6: Responsibilities of a training supervision**

So being a student matters to me. I am not a counsellor, out there professionally working, I am a student...a newbie...I've got expectations on me and serious constraints. I am also a learner, a novice; I am learning my trade...If I wasn't a student I wouldn't really give a toss. I would be just focussing on the client and whatever way you chose to work with me; I will go with that, trusting your experience and insight, and the relationship between supervisor and counsellor. (Kay, see page 65)

### **Introduction**

As noted in Chapter 2, supervision with student counsellors is more complex than supervision with experienced practitioners especially so when theoretical orientations of supervisor and student are non-aligned. In this second results chapter, I explore two aspects of interdiscursive supervision where I found myself caught between constructionist and humanistic approaches to counselling. I reflexively examine the relational tension and discursive dissonance that occurred and the discursive border-crossings and shifts I undertook in order to meet ethical challenges and responsibilities in a "training supervision" (Carroll, 1996). Kay and I had already worked together in supervision for one year and Kay had requested we continue in the year of my research project. As we were to discover, in our negotiations at the start of the project, expectations around Kay's student positioning in her final year of training were not sufficiently discussed. Furthermore, a lack of clarity over expectations, responsibilities and processes of supervision presented me with ethical challenges as supervisor and as researcher.

As supervisor, I was one of Kay's assessors in her final accreditation process. Evaluation in the final year of Kay's programme was based on a written case study and a video-tape of counselling practice prepared, in collaboration with me as supervisor, throughout the year. Therefore, the discursive tensions encountered during the year of the project were more shaping of supervision than in our previous year when there was no formal supervision involvement in accreditation. Ethical challenges included: the centrality of supervision for assessment and accreditation; the complexities of dual roles and supervisor/assessor power

relations; the effects for Kay's practice development of our different theoretical orientations; and the anxieties and vulnerabilities of a final year student striving to meet academic requirements.

As in the previous results chapter, I first offer excerpts from supervision dialogue accompanied by a reflexive commentary on what is happening in those moments of speaking. I then provide excerpts from the subsequent research conversation where Kay reflects on her experiences of supervision, and I offer a further reflexive commentary on her reflections. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the discourses producing theoretical tensions and the ethical responsibilities of a training supervision. I begin with a detailed critical analysis of an episode from our first recorded supervision where moments of discursive disjuncture became sharply visible to me. This episode shows how my concern for a client's positioning in counselling overshadowed my concern for Kay's positioning in supervision. As a result of my client focus, Kay was distanced from her own practice knowledges, skills, and preferences. As with Claire in the previous chapter, I found myself "acting on" Kay, in the same way that I had witnessed her "acting on" the client in the report of the counselling practice event she brought to supervision. I deliberately make this piece of work available in order to illustrate the ease by which practices of power might be enacted unknowingly by a supervisor in supervision.

### **Supervision 1: Moving from limiting to illuminating narratives**

Kay took her ethical responsibilities as a student very seriously and had mainly used supervision as case consultation, offering detailed accounts of clients' stories and explaining to me her counselling interventions. In this first recorded supervision, Kay had just finished detailing a client's dream in which a flood had threatened to sweep Maggie, her client, downstream but the client had managed to stop herself from being swept away. After listening to details of the dream and events in Maggie's life, including her unsatisfactory relationship with her husband, I had wanted to bring a more reflective focus into the supervision conversation. Attempting to move the conversation away from the client's story and onto to the story of Kay's counselling, I had asked Kay about the theories she was using in her practice.

**Ireni:** Can you tell me what theories you have been using in your work with Maggie?

**Kay:** Well...I have used a mixture of internal family systems, her internal parts, and TA...and dream work... [Pause]

My intention here was to invite Kay to report less on Maggie's story and to move towards a more reflexive posture about her own counselling practice. Hearing hesitation in Kay's reply, my next question focussed on how the client had experienced counselling.

**Ireni:** And how has Maggie experienced these different approaches...which ones has she found most useful?

**Kay:** Well... [Pause] I think she got a lot out of the dream work... [Longer Pause]

**Ireni:** What do you think she got out of the dream work?

My inquiry had shifted the focus from Kay's counselling modalities and onto the *effects* of her practice for the client. I had asked Kay to evaluate from the client's perspective, the effectiveness of the counselling approaches she had been using. My inquiry was too big a leap from the landscape of *action* (Kay's practice) to the landscape of *meaning* (theorising her practice and making meaning of her practice). In Kay's hesitation, I could hear immediately that my words had not positioned her well to speak. Without a bridge to help her to move between a landscape of action and a landscape of meaning, Kay struggled to articulate her practice. I continued;

**Ireni:** Was it useful for Maggie, do you think?

**Kay:** Yes, it was useful. We worked on her depression issues using her dream...unlike the times when her wounded child takes over in her real life, in her dream she was in her adult self, and she had stopped herself being swept away in the flood...I tried to reinforce that other part of her, or that other story, as you would say...

In her response, Kay was working to hold both her therapeutic framework and my narrative framework in the space between us: a transpersonal metaphor and a storying metaphor. However, I noticed myself moving away from the internalised

expressions of “wounded child” and “adult self” and thus, I missed the opportunity to notice the shared storyline Kay was offering. Instead, I was caught up in the very disjuncture that my research set out to notice, that is, the discursive interruption when supervisor and counsellor practice from different paradigms.

**Ireni:** So, how did the client understand the dream? Did she see it on those terms as well?

My inquiry contained a slight note of troubling the transactional discourse shaping Kay’s reply. I had moved away from Kay’s interpretation and had centred the client’s understandings. In persisting with a focus on the client’s experience of counselling, I had again called Kay into a landscape more distant for her at that moment. My response indirectly signalled a movement away from interpretations of behaviour based on internalised psychologies and professional diagnoses. From a narrative orientation, my inquiry was shaped by an ethic of consulting your consultants (Epston & White, 1992). I wanted to highlight for Kay, the risk that unilateral construction of meaning by a counsellor may obscure a client’s local and particular meaning-making. However, my intentions were not transparent and therefore not clearly understood by Kay.

Instead of bridging the relational and discursive gap opening up between us, my response had distanced Kay even further from her own practice knowledge by my concern for a politics of client practice. The questions I had asked Kay were located in “experience-distant” (White, 2007) landscapes for her. Paradoxically, this positioned Kay as disadvantaged in the meaning-making of our supervision conversation; just as I was wondering if the client had been disadvantaged in the meaning-making of the counselling conversation. Recognising the effects of my speaking, I shifted my focus back to Kay’s practice.

**Ireni:** So...you helped Maggie make sense of her dream using these approaches...?

**Kay:** Yes, she told me the following week that the dream work was helpful...and she said it had been a more positive week for her... [Kay gives details of more positive week]

**Ireni:** How do you think Maggie was able to do that? [Long pause]...

My inquiry in the above exchange, was intended to call Kay forward, as a counsellor helping Maggie make sense of her dream, and to invite her to take up a position as an authoring subject of her practice. I had seen the “more positive week” that the client had as a “unique outcome” (White, 2007) and my intention was to invite Kay to story an account of the effects of her practice for the client and thus, to story further development of her practice. Instead, my inquiry again had positioned Kay as unknowing. Recognising Kay’s struggle to respond, I asked:

**Ireni:** How did the work you did together make a difference for her in the following week?

**Kay:** I’d like to say that deep work has been done... [Long Pause]

Hearing Kay’s response, located within discourses of the unconscious and “deep work”, I experienced further discursive dissonance. Kay’s speculation that the client’s shift in mood had resulted from some invisible process, contrasted with my efforts to invite Kay to visiblise and articulate her contribution to this change. In my response, I tried to find my footing in Kay’s theoretical landscape. With a sense of ambivalence, I asked:

**Ireni:** What sort of deep work, do you think?

**Kay:** I think we are at a deeper level...instead of her wounded child taking over in the dream, her adult self was in control...but it is at an unconscious level...

**Ireni:** Oh...okay...

From a Narrative Therapy perspective, I considered Kay’s response, that counselling was at a “deeper level” and change was taking place “at an unconscious level”, were “thin” descriptions of her practice. In accounting for her client’s shift on the terms of a “deep work” discourse, Kay was aligning with particular diagnoses, speculation, and conjecture, which obscured her own contribution to the work. Her client had been positioned in relation to a system of professional discourses (TA and Dream Analysis) and a discourse I will term “counsellor as expert” that I considered was limiting of the client’s and Kay’s agency. Both Kay’s practice and the client’s “positive week” were being

attributed to “deep work” in Kay’s account of the practice event. Furthermore, there had been no exploration of wider relational or social contexts.

I am not suggesting here that persons are not deeply moved as a result of therapeutic conversations. Likewise, I do not wish to put under erasure the notion of an inner self. It was discourses of internalised identity and the absence of Kay’s agency for her practice that produced the dissonance in this incident. I felt an “emotional disturbance” (Dewey, 1997, p.74) at this disjuncture for I did not know how to help Kay step into a thicker account of her practice. I regarded the subtext, the gap between our words, as a dislocation I could not breach I could not mend in this moment. Struggling to find more common ground, I moved the conversation elsewhere.

This particular exchange was both disturbing for me in terms of my supervision practice, and of great interest to me in terms of my research questions. I wondered how Kay might interpret this piece of dialogue when she reviewed it again for our reflective/research meeting in one month’s time.

### **Research Meeting 1: Reflections on supervision**

Kay had come well prepared to this meeting with written notes and I began the interview by asking her what she noticed in our supervision session.

**Kay:** A couple of things came up and I thought, “*Why didn’t you respond to that?*” At one point I said to you, “*I think we might be at a deeper level*”...Because something had changed for the client and I had an interpretation about that, I had a hypothesis about that...and there was no response from you to that, whereas for me it was quite a profound moment.

From her speaking position as research participant, Kay was making visible my lack of response to her expression, “deep work had been done”. I had not found a way to tell her at the time that it was not disinterest but discomfort that had kept me silent in supervision. I had not wanted to engage in hypothesising or speculating about the client’s process and this reluctance had closed down space for Kay to explore and expand her counselling practice on terms that made sense

for her. Hearing Kay's reflection in this meeting, I experienced a further sense of discomfort for I agree with Jevne, Sawatzky and Paré (2004) that "supervision is *deep* work, and especially so when we can make space for practitioners to be active explorers of their own experiences" (p.149, italics in original). As supervisor, I had wanted Kay to experience herself as an "active explorer" in supervision; yet in that moment of competing political commitments and conflicting theoretical paradigms, my responses had prevented Kay from exploring her practice on the terms available to her.

My concern for a politics of client practice meant that in supervision I was more present to the power relations that had produced Kay as "expert"; speculating and diagnosing, claiming intrapsychic interpretations for the client's "positive week". My preference for positioning clients as consultants and using inquiry to thicken stories of achievement and alternative knowledges conflicted with the discourses in which Kay was locating her practice. As a result, Kay was distanced from her own practice knowledges through not having an agentic speaking position in supervision. As a result of hearing how Kay had experienced supervision, I decided that I would invite her to be an active explorer of her supervision experiences in this research conversation.

**Ireni:** So what happened for you Kay, when I didn't give you a response to your hypothesis that you might be at a deeper level?

**Kay:** I didn't say anything about it at the time, except I noticed you didn't respond to it and then when I watched the tape I thought, "*Why are we not talking about this? This is not of interest to you...why?*" I can tell you straight off—this is one of the big differences I noticed. There was not a lot of talking around the working of the dream, or the techniques of dream analysis. When I replayed the tape, I just wrote down your responses to whatever I was saying and then I went back over it. I could see the sort of emphasis where you are coming from, and I thought this helped clarify for me the difference between your perspective and the different modalities that I am studying. So, for example, I noticed there was not a lot of teasing out of the different modalities. But there was quite a strong emphasis on exploring the **meaning** of things, what do things **mean**, and how does the

client **make sense of** this or that. So that was the constant theme—**meanings.**

Hearing that Kay had anticipated more discussion around the “working of the dream”, I again experienced an emotional disturbance just as I had in supervision when Kay spoke of “deep work”. Questions surfaced for me about my suitability as a supervisor for Kay, for I did not want supervision to narrow Kay’s professional development in her final year. Rather, I wanted supervision to expand possibilities for her practice and increase her confidence in her professional development.

Just as Kay took her responsibilities as a student counsellor seriously, she took her commitment as a research participant seriously. Kay had listed my questions, asked over the course of supervision, but condensed for the purposes of this research meeting, and read them out to me.

**Kay:** You said: **“How did you interpret the meaning of the positive week?” “Is that meaning [deep work] something you had talked about with the client, or was that your meaning?”** That was a challenging question because I hadn’t discussed my hypothesis with the client...

Although I had wanted to elicit, in our supervision conversation a politics of counsellor transparency, my questions had been unclear and challenging for Kay. She went on to explain that her understanding of the counselling approach she was learning was that counsellors develop a “working hypothesis” and asked indirect questions to test its validity, rather than share their thinking with a client directly. Kay continued to read out my questions, asked in response to her responses in supervision:

**Kay:** You asked **“Tell me what theories you have been using.”** That was a good bit for a student. **“So which parts of family systems have you been using?” “So you are using a number of different theories you have been learning?”** And then we moved out of my modalities and into the narrative bit. **“So what sense do you make of the dream?” “What sense does Maggie make of it?” “So, she made her own meaning of the**



**dream, quite profound meaning, by herself?” “And how did you help her make sense of the dream?” “Did Maggie find the work useful?” “Do you think the dream work had anything to do with the positive week?” “Are you naming her feelings as depression?” “Is that how Maggie describes her feelings?” “What are your ideas about depression?”**

In listing these questions, Kay’s focus was only on the questions I had asked, not our dialogue. Kay had identified places in supervision where she had experienced me “moving out of [her] modalities” and “into the narrative bit”. My questions were situated in the landscape of meaning, and were intended to assist Kay to story her practice more richly. Without Kay understanding the purposes for my questions, or my preferred textual landscapes of action and conscientiousness (Bruner, 1986), she was positioned outside her own familiar, individualised and internalised understandings.

### **The workings of power relations in supervision**

Narrative practice seeks to make operations of power visible, “to deconstruct their effects, and to enhance the agency of those with whom we work” (Winslade, 2009, p.1). By not making my thinking behind my inquiry clear and my theoretical location transparent, I had overlooked the workings of power in our supervision relationship. I had allowed my concern for a politics of client practice to shape my inquiry—a concern that Maggie’s experience had been viewed unilaterally by Kay through an internalised and individualised lens. My positioning in my preferred narrative discourses had closed down dialogic space for Kay to reflect on her practice on terms that made sense to her. My words in supervision could be read as “acting upon” Kay, positioning her in relation to systems of meanings (Narrative Therapy) and to power relations of supervisor/student, in much the same way that I had questioned the positioning of her client in relation to psychological systems of meaning (“deep work”, the unconscious) and to power relations of counsellor/client. It was time now, in this research conversation, to interrupt previous workings of power and to invite Kay to take up a more agentic speaking position in the research conversation.

**Ireni:** So, in the dream sequence, you thought that I was more interested in

Maggie's meaning of the dream and the effects for her of the counselling, rather than asking you about the techniques of the dream analysis?

**Kay:** Yes...that's right, or how to make it a better dream analysis. And for me, as a learner, being a better dream analyst is where I'm at, because I'm consciously...not consciously incompetent, but you know, on that level of things.

**Ireni:** Do you think talking about meanings would be important in a TA or dream analysis approach?

**Kay:** Yes, they are, but it's different to *talking* about the *meaning* of it. You see, I am thinking in my head, "*Maggie is coming from her childhood in this moment, and her child feels this and this*". So I try and anticipate the meaning that her child might be making. We don't say, "*What does that mean to you?*" It is not about *meaning*, it's about *feelings*, expressing the feeling and completing a process...It's a language thing, isn't it? My inner landscape is heavily Rogerian and TA...and I am trying to match that with yours and you presented me with another language [narrative]. When I went through the tape I thought: "*She talks about words, language, meanings, and asks question*"...whereas I am more interested in feelings.

I was taken by surprise by Kay's reflections for I had not anticipated such a privileged emphasis on "feelings". Such a focus had not arisen in our supervision in the previous year. I was aware that in a Person-Centred approach, reflection of feelings is considered important but I had not expected my inquiry around sense-making to be experienced by Kay as a binary construction. This was new information for me, brought to the surface of our conversation by the research project. In hearing how Kay made meaning of her counselling practice, I had to find ways to bridge the conflicting binary construction and open space for a both/and position. In the gap that followed Kay's speaking, I wondered how I might introduce a discourse of counselling as meaning-making, without criticising her preference for a focus on counselling-as-process. I decided to pick up Kay's words, "not consciously incompetent", for in them I heard a possible thread of connection that might offer a place of common ground for us both to meet.

**Ireni:** So, being a better dream analyst, gaining more competence...is that something you want to use supervision for?

**Kay:** Yes, I do, for I'm looking for how I can do this *better*...I just felt focussing on meanings is a different thing...[Pause]...I am not saying that what you said is wrong but it is in the framework of Narrative Therapy probably...

Through my close attention to what Kay had said about her preferences, my question had taken us away from the closed space of binary constructs and opened up another direction for our conversation. Kay was offering both a critical reflection and a relational comment—neither of our counselling perspectives was “wrong”, just different. We had arrived at a new place where shared understanding did not have to mean shared agreement.

### **Sustaining relational responsiveness amidst narratives of difference**

I heard Kay working to hold both her dream analysis approach and my Narrative Therapy approach more clearly in this *research* conversation than in the *supervision* conversation. Stepping forward into the space Kay was offering, I offered in return, transparency, tentativeness, and inquiry in order to meet her in this shared moment of vulnerability.

**Ireni:** Well, not working with dreams myself...[Pause] and not being an expert in that area...[Pause] and not working with TA...[Pause] or internal family systems...[Pause] not using those modalities...[Pause], could that be a limitation in our supervision this year?

Not knowing the consequences of my speaking, but being vulnerable and open to the unknown (Davies & Gannon, 2009), I brought the notion of “limitation” into the conversation. I did not wish to cover up or minimise the effects of theoretical difference. I made my limitations visible, and in doing so, I was positioning myself alongside Kay: we had both stepped into places of unknowing.

### **The difference that makes a difference**

Reflecting on my use of the word “limitation”, I heard echoes of Gregory Bateson's (1972) words, “the difference which makes a difference” (p.272). As an anthropologist, Bateson maintained that the occurrence of any new event was in

response to difference, for, in the world of the living “nothing can be understood until differences and distinctions are invoked” (Bateson, 1980, p.8). However, difference that creates too large a gap, he suggested, goes unnoticed. I wondered if the idea of “limitation” would be a difference that made a difference to supervision. By moving towards a position of tentativeness and vulnerability, I hoped to open up more space for Kay’s own experience to come forward.

**Kay:** Well, yes, because I am struggling with how I could be better at this work. I have to get through my qualifications, and I have to perform. I am constrained by this expectation of the case study I have to write and I have to demonstrate my abilities in these particular modalities.

Hearing Kay’s struggles, I felt called to offer reassurance and to tell her that other students from her training programme had successfully graduated while in supervision with me. However, the effects of reassurance, like the effects of certainty, might close down space for Kay to voice her concerns. I acknowledged my responsibility for the lack of clarity in our supervision contract.

**Ireni:** That is a very important point, Kay [Pause]...and something that we probably haven’t discussed enough in supervision or when we set up our contract this year. I wonder what the limitations might be for you...

By languaging Kay’s concerns as “a very important point”, I was attempting to keep open the clearing we had just created. I used the “collective-we” (Shotter, 2007), aligning myself alongside Kay so that her “concerns” and “struggles” became a shared responsibility.

**Kay:** But you see I wouldn’t really know [the limitations] because I am developing awareness of these things. In fact, the more I know the more aware I am of the differences. [Pause]...I know nothing [Pause]...I just want to soak it all up. You say it and I will follow. I mean I appreciate the differences, don’t get me wrong, but for me I suppose my priority worry is working with clients and my other priority worry is performing for [counsellor training programme].

Kay's response illustrated the complexities of the responsibilities she carried as a student counsellor learning her craft. She was positioned simultaneously in academic discourse, counselling discourse and supervision discourse. In this moment, she was also an agentic research participant, thus positioned as both knowing and unknowing. I was interested to understand better how Kay made meaning of the idea of "developing awareness". What was Kay becoming more aware of?

**Ireni:** That's quite a realisation you've come to Kay. Would you say this realisation, this knowledge about difference, is something you have been sitting with for a while? Was it present last year in supervision for example, or has it been brought forward by looking at the tape of our supervision? Do you think reviewing the tape illuminated it more?

Kay's response to my inquiry takes me forward to the next theoretical point I want to make.

### **Finding a speaking position in essentialist discourses**

In narrative practice, expressions of experience are understood to contain multiple or hidden meanings which can be made visible. In order to "speak ourselves differently" (Drewery & Winslade, 1997, p.33) these hidden discourses need to be visible and available speaking positions need to be offered. By asking Kay if this was "knowledge that she had been sitting with", my intention was to interrupt the trajectory of "I know nothing" and encourage Kay to speak as a person with valuable knowledge for supervision and for my research, as she had been doing. By repeating Kay's words, "developing awareness" as "realisation", "knowledge", and "illuminations", I made other possible discourses available to her from which to "make experience comprehensible" (Bruner, 1986, p.27). Kay replied:

**Kay:** I think watching the tape of our supervision illuminated it [Pause]...I know everyone is going to have their orientation, so of course there are going to be differences [Pause]...but for the purposes of this research [Pause]...reflecting on the tape, and thinking about it, has made me much more aware. I know why I couldn't continue the conversation with you because I didn't have the language or the words. There was a lot of 'sensing this' or 'maybe that' talk on your part but we didn't have a

language in common so we could not understand each other clearly. Putting our differences into words makes those differences very clear to me. So that's powerful.

**Ireni:** It is...yes, it's very powerful...

We shared a silent moment, smiling at each other, recognising that at this new place we share a mutual understanding. From a poststructural perspective, speaking from a subjective subject position is to exercise power in the discursive worlds we inhabit (Davies, 1991). In the course of this conversation, Kay and I had grappled with our discursive discomforts, named disturbances, created a clearing for shared understanding and had sustained relational connection. We had both exercised power. I now needed to keep this new space open in supervision for Kay to speak to her “developing awareness”. Stories of “limitations” and “illuminations” might accompany us in future supervision but together we had created some common ground for both experiences to be storied. From our shared moment of understanding, Kay continued to position herself agentively as a counselling student learning her craft—one of her preferred identities.

**Kay:** So being a student matters to me. I am not a counsellor out there professionally working. I am a student. I've got expectations on me and serious constraints. I am also a learner; I am learning my trade, so I am at that consciously incompetent stage where I know I don't know. I know I'm not an expert, but I'm not completely hopeless. I am struggling up this ladder and practising the skills, and wanting to know, “How can I do this better?” So, I want you to pick me up on this or that. Don't let me get away with what I should be doing *in the modality*. I really want to be good at the dream work and if I am doing TA I really want to be good at the TA bit, I want to be on top of it, focussed and sharp, as well as I can be, in that modality.

In contrast to her earlier speaking, Kay had now inserted herself as a storying subject, telling a story about herself from the space I had made available in the conversation. Perhaps this space was made possible by my earlier acknowledgement of “limitation”. In using first person repeatedly, she was clearly visible “on the surface of the grammar of her talk” (Crocket, 2001, p. 292). Kay's

professional identity claims, and her desire for competency in the modalities taught in her programme, illuminated my responsibilities I was called to take up in supervision. The clarity and robustness of Kay's speaking, gave me hope that together we would find ways to realise her hopes for her preferred professional development.

**Ireni:** So what implications do you think this might have for our future supervision? For example, I am thinking that these reflections on supervision can actually benefit our supervision. I am hoping that through reflecting and looking more closely at supervision, [in these research meetings] we can take what we are learning into the next supervision and it can be useful...

**Kay:** Absolutely! [Nodding her head and laughing]

From my dual position as researcher and as supervisor, my response called Kay into the work of co-constructing our supervision. I again used the "collective-we" to stand *with* Kay as a co-inquirer. Marshall Fine and Jean Turner (1997) used the metaphor of "co-labouring" to describe their understanding of collaborative supervision. They imagined counsellors experiencing a supervisor as "co-laboring with them in constructing new therapy paths—everyone wearing the same yellow hard hats as they jointly forge through the brush and maneuver across uncharted ground" (p.237). Kay and I had forged our way through a difficult conversation and had arrived at a place of shared understanding and common purpose.

As we continued our reflections, I asked Kay what kinds of questions would be more helpful to her in our future supervision, inviting her to take responsibility for co-constructing supervision. I hoped that we would achieve collaborative understanding about meaning-making, a process then that might become available for Kay to take into her counselling practice. Our dialogue in this first research meeting proved not only constructive for my research questions, but also for our subsequent supervision sessions.

I have presented a more detailed analysis of an extract from this first sequence of supervision and research conversation as it was in this first research meeting that substantial and significant discursive movement occurred. From a poststructural

understanding of agency and change, persons exercise agency according to how they are positioned, in relationship, within a “complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1978, p.93). In the power relations of the society and social practice of supervision, when different therapeutic ideas had remained unspoken, Kay had been positioned less agentively to produce her own practice story. In contrast, in the social practice of research, I had listened “generously” to difference (Shawver, 2005). I had stayed closer to Kay’s speaking and had stepped into a place of vulnerability as supervisor. This research meeting provided a significant learning for me and for the development of my future practice. I realised that in supervision I would need to scaffold my inquiry closer to Kay’s preferences and take greater care of her subject positioning as a student, “learning her craft”.

In the rest of this chapter, I provide extracts of data-texts from subsequent supervision and research conversations which show the development of supervision as I worked to stay closer to Kay’s preferred counselling practice. My responsibilities for supervision, illuminated more clearly in this first research meeting were: to find ways that supported Kay in meeting the requirements of her training programme; to assist her in becoming a competent practitioner on her preferred terms; to strive for reflexivity towards the workings of power when theoretical orientations clashed in supervision.

## **Supervision 2: Shaping practice through research**

This second recorded supervision session followed one month after the first research meeting. Kay had brought to supervision a complex practice event where she had used a combination of dream work, two-chair work and whiteboard work. After listening and drawing out details of her practice, I had invited Kay to extend her understanding of her practice.

**Ireni:** That sounds quite a complicated session, Kay, what did you think of it?

**Kay:** Well...I think I am quite clever, doing the dream work with two chairs and the way it flowed together.

**Ireni:** Can you say a bit more about that?

**Kay:** Well, somehow I managed to get TA, the two-chair work, and the



dream work, to all come together in the same session. For example, I transferred the working of the dream off the whiteboard and onto the floor, getting the client to use two chairs to talk to the child/adult parts of her which were in the dream...[Pause]...I thought I was quite clever doing that. Do you know what I mean?

**Ireni:** Do you mean by that...it was clever to use different models and skills...?

**Kay:** And sort of combined... [Pause]

**Ireni:**...and you combined different models together?

**Kay:** Yes, exactly [excited tone] that's what I did...and I thought, "Wow!"

**Ireni:** What does the "wow" mean? What are you telling yourself?

**Kay:** I thought that I was quite creative.

**Ireni:** Quite creative...can you say more about that?

**Kay:** Well...it means that I am more confident because all that [what I did] would be fairly spontaneous...because you can't tell what is going to happen in a session. I don't start off with a plan. I want to respond to the client and the material...and I did, I responded to that.

In this exchange, I stayed much closer to Kay's speaking as she moved between landscape of action (the techniques she had used) and landscape of identity (making meaning of her actions). In this conversation, Kay was the storying subject in relation to her practice: "I thought I was quite clever", "quite creative", "more confident" and "fairly spontaneous". In storying herself in this way, Kay was placing her practice at the centre of the conversation rather than the story of the client. Furthermore, Kay placed her own management of the modalities, rather than the modalities themselves, at the centre of her account. In storying this pleasing account of her practice, Kay was authenticating herself as a counsellor growing in competence in her preferred modalities. Using externalising language, I invited Kay to thicken her account of these new aspects of her practice.

**Ireni:** Are "spontaneity", "cleverness" and "creativity", new developments this year, Kay, or have you been aware of them before in your counselling?

**Kay:** Well...it's how I want to practice but I have been too worried,

asking myself, “*Am I getting the technique right?*”

**Ireni:** If you were less worried about “getting it right”, how might that affect your spontaneity and creativity?

**Kay:** Oh I think I would do better...my worry wouldn’t hold me back.

As we continued to examine the effect of “worry” for Kay’s professional development, I assisted her to move from a “struggling” student towards a more “creative” student. These discursive shifts in Kay’s identity were made possible by the type of inquiry I offered. Without my inquiry, possibilities for Kay to re-author herself as a spontaneous, clever, and creative practitioner may not have occurred. In this instance, I had listened with openness at the “level of the word” (Weingarten, 1998) for opportunities where I could help Kay to thicken a preferred story of her professional identity. Noticing the ways Kay had experimented with different approaches in her work, I had contributed to bringing forward an account in which Kay was positioned as more agentic in the storying of her practice.

## **Research meeting 2: Reflections on supervision**

### **Co-labouring with yellow hard hats**

I now turn to the second research meeting which followed one month later, after we had each reviewed the above supervision session. As previously mentioned (on page 98), in order to pass the accreditation assessment at the end of the year, Kay was required to submit a case study and a video demonstrating competent counselling practice. At the time of this recorded supervision, for various reasons, Kay had not yet managed to video-tape a counselling session so I had not observed her client practice. My feedback in supervision had been based on her reporting her practice to me. I started this meeting by asking Kay what stood out for her when she watched the tape of supervision. In this research meeting, Kay spoke of wanting more direction and guidance from me so that she knew she was “on the right track”.

**Kay:** It was very insightful for me when I watched the DVD, for I noticed how prone I am to detail, to exactitude...and that might be the student having to do everything right...and I felt gosh, I talk a lot!...

**Ireni:** Why is that, do you think?

**Kay:** I think that is me trying to prove to you, as a student, that I am *doing* the counselling techniques and I am *demonstrating* to you that I am putting into practice what I am learning. I notice myself doing a lot of that, so in a way, I am seeking your approval that I am putting my learning into practice. All the time I want to demonstrate to you that I *can* do this, and I *am* doing this, and I am doing it in *this* sort of way. I want to know if I am doing the right thing...

As student learning her craft, and positioned by a discourse of supervision as instructional, evaluative, and instrumental, Kay was seeking my approval that she was putting her learning into practice. Her values, ethics and commitments to her clients and to her developing counselling practice were clearly visible to me.

**Ireni:** And am I giving you sufficient feedback, that I think you are demonstrating learning?

**Kay:** Well...I guess I expect you to be sitting there like a guru and assessing me in my practice. You are up there, idealised, and you're the supervisor and I am the student. So I guess I feel my vulnerability, I am not qualified yet...I'm just acquiring skills. I am a bit tender, if you know what I mean. I need to be managed a bit by you. I suppose that's what I'm saying. I would appreciate it if you got a bit bossy with me, because I would feel that you were managing me and I can trust you –it's like tramping with a guide...you can trust the guide that she knows where she is going and won't wonder off the track.

In this extract, change in the “discursive register” (Gergen, 2001) and shifts in Kay's positioning are clearly visible in her speaking. Kay first noticed how she was positioned by discourses of training and supervision—student-as-devotee—and therefore, how I was positioned—supervisor-as-guru. Even as she spoke this discourse, Kay went on to refuse it. By refusing to accept this positioning, Kay re-named supervisor-as-guide and re-positioned herself as tramper, thus changing the discourses by which she was being constituted. Kay's reflections caused me to wonder if I had been too lacking in direction, too “hands off” for a student “learning her craft”... had Kay wanted me to provide a more technical and

instructional supervision?

I readily accepted Kay positioning of me as a guide for it conjured up Fine and Turner's (1997) metaphor of supervision as a co-labouring, collaborative enterprise and offered more possibilities for a generative rather than reproductive supervision.

**Ireni:** Ok...so a little bit more guiding...Perhaps in our next supervision session we could get the maps out, the suggested supervision plan from [the training programme], and start ticking off some of the things we have covered...and perhaps you could bring a videotape next time, of your practice...

**Kay:** Yes that would be good...I instantly feel a sense of relief...

By hearing Kay's anxiety and agreeing to offer more direction and guidance, I opened up more space for Kay to co-construct supervision. Kay agreed to bring video-tapes of her practice to supervision so that I could offer more direct feedback. At the end of this research meeting, Kay reflected on the differences in our therapeutic language.

**Kay:** It is a language thing, isn't it? Every modality has its language and we talk within that language and we communicate our understanding of the modality... and all the meaning is deeper...the meaning is expressed in terms of the language of the modality. Perhaps we could talk in the language of the modality I am studying.

In hearing Kay's request that we talk in the language of her preferred modalities, I was reminded of Edward Sampson's (1993) words:

If, in order to be heard, I must speak in ways you have proposed, then I can be heard only if I speak like you, not like me. Rather than being an equal contributor I remain enclosed in a discursive game that ensures your continuing advantage. (p.1227)

As supervisor, I did not want to enclose Kay in language games that ensured my advantage, just as I did not want to be enclosed in non-political, structuralist,

humanistic discourses within which Kay was positioned as a student counsellor. My task would be to continue to work for a third space; a reflexive space of common ground where both of us could find speaking positions that offered agency.

I now provide a short extract from our third recorded supervision session in which Kay had brought a video-tape of a counselling session for us to review. Through listening closely to Kay's preferences and moving towards those preferences, I came to understand better the complexities and the responsibilities of an interdiscursive supervision practice.

### **Supervision 3: Laying down the path as we walk it**

Kay arrived at supervision with a very clear agenda. She first wanted us to watch a video tape of her practice and get feedback that she was "on the right track". Second, she had concerns that the presenting problems of a new client might be outside her scope of competence. Before we watched the video, I asked Kay what she wanted me to notice in particular. I wanted Kay to take a position as primary author of her practice and to evaluate her practice first, before my supervisory voice entered the conversation. Kay had prepared self-reflective questions for us to consider, indicating to me that she was committed to the process of review and development of her practice.

**Ireni:** So, Kay, what do you want me to notice and what kind of responses do you want from me?

**Kay:** I have questions here, which I wrote down...OK, I want to know from you if I am doing what I say I am doing. Do you perceive this to be so? How potent am I in the work? How effective am I? Is my work good now? Am I doing it well enough? My assumptions about what is working may not be how the client sees it.

**Ireni:** And what do you think? How would you answer those questions?

**Kay:** Well, my gut feeling is that I am doing OK and the session with the client went well. But as I said last time, I need to know what you think of my work.

We proceeded to watch the video-tape with Kay stopping it at various points of

interest. I asked questions to reflect further on these points of interest and, at the end of the segment of tape we watched, I invited Kay to comment first on her reflections.

**Ireni:** What are your thoughts as you watched the video again?

**Kay:** I thought I was a bit too certain...maybe too directive in directing the session.

**Ireni:** Which parts of the session are you referring to?

**Kay:** When I asked the client to write on the whiteboard...and put up her different internal system parts...was I a bit too like a teacher, too instructional perhaps?

**Ireni:** You asked at the beginning, is my work effective? How would you know if writing her internal systems parts on the whiteboard was effective for the client?

**Kay:** [Pause]...I guess I could ask her...[Pause]

**Ireni:** So...you might ask the client, “how’s this going for you? Is this helpful?”

**Kay:** Yes, maybe I could do something like an intervention and ask the client to evaluate it...that would move me on from being too knowing...I could plan my next session based around feedback from the client about what works for her...[Excited voice]

**Ireni:** In a way, the client becomes a bit of a coach...or in narrative terms, a consultant...

In Kay’s words, “I guess I could ask her” I heard echoes of the narrative practice of consulting your consultants (Epston, 1999; Epston & White, 1992). It was this consultative approach which had shaped my inquiry in our first recorded supervision when I asked Kay how her client had experienced the use of dream work in counselling. At that time, the idea of Kay inviting clients to be consultants had not been directly named by me but lay as a sub-text in my speaking. Now, in this conversation, Kay was calling on this idea herself by suggesting that asking her clients for their evaluation would “move her on from being too knowing”. Kay’s response to my question, “how would you know if your work was effective for the client?” was local, situated, and relational—“I guess I could ask her”—

rather than situated in discourses of “getting the technique right” or “deep work”.

In response to Kay’s desire for more coaching and guiding from me, I offered more feedback on the video.

**Ireni:** I noticed that you had clarified with the client her goals for the session and you asked permission before starting the whiteboard exercise. You asked her if she wanted to do two-chair work before you started. I see this as collaborative and respectful practice.

In this supervision session, I had experienced our interdiscursive dialogue as a pathway under construction. Both Kay and I had reached a place of collaboration, transparency, and relational robustness. Although we continued to hold to our own theoretical preferences, we were both better positioned in supervision to negotiate the stepping-stones required to cross over different theoretical landscapes.

Also in this supervision session, Kay discussed her concern that she may be “out of her depth” with a new client. I discuss Kay’s reflections on this discussion in the following extracts from our third research meeting.

### **Research Meeting 3: Reflections on supervision**

#### **Supervisor as guide**

During our third recorded supervision, as well as watching a video-tape of Kay’s counselling practice, Kay had brought her concerns about working outside her scope of competence with a new client, Fiona. In supervision, we had carefully considered the resources Kay might require to work safely and effectively with this client. I had offered close guidance, including telephone assistance and additional consultation. Kay expressed that she would continue to see Fiona as she felt supported by me and our careful negotiations, and was ready to extend her counselling practice experience. I started this reflective/research meeting by inviting Kay to comment on what stood out for her when watching the DVD of our supervision.

**Kay:** Well...I liked the way you responded to the fact that I really needed

your close guidance with my new client because I felt anxious as a student and a novice, and you picked up on that. I noticed how you checked up that I was resourced to work with this client and that came through quite clearly. You checked that I could actually do this work, supported by yourself and other resources. And you also gave me permission *twice* not to carry through if I thought it was too much for me! That was a strong position for you to take. And you even said “**I am taking some responsibility here as supervisor**” and I really appreciated that.

Kay’s reflections illustrated the use of closer inquiry as a major strategy for supporting Kay as she developed her professional practice. I was reassured by her words that I was stepping up to my responsibility as a guide. Kay then offered feedback on her experience of watching the video-tape of her practice.

**Kay:** As you know, I have had this concern about being a student, so it was *really* helpful for me when we looked at the videotape of my practice. I needed you to tell me if I was doing what I said I was doing! And you said I was! So that was a big encouragement for me because it meant that I am doing the job now! [Very excited tone]

**Ireni:** Oh, that’s good feedback Kay because in our last research meeting, you said you wanted me to “*get a bit bossy*” so you would feel “*managed*” by me. What do you think now?

**Kay:** I do feel that you are offering me more guidance and I am on track...I think I need to take more responsibility to talk about the things that are important to me...I think it’s my responsibility to clarify with you when I want you to critique me on something particular...I’ve appreciated your transparency in talking about our differences in supervision.

Kay’s words illustrate the shifting boundaries of supervision as guiding, educating, reflecting, and storying of professional identity. By bringing our discursive differences to the surface of the conversation, and making those differences transparent, I had supported Kay to take more responsibility for the co-construction of supervision. Kay was taking up a more authorial position in relation to her own practice. Just as Kay was taking up more responsibility for talking about the things that were important to her, I was taking more



responsibility as a researcher for talking about the things that interested me. I asked Kay if there was anything else she noticed about supervision in terms of difference.

**Kay:** Well...one thing is asking clients exactly what they mean, and writing their words down...I never did that before. Writing notes while in the process of counselling is not something that I'm used to...I realise that I have some strong convictions about what counselling is for me and supervision has helped me move out of my area of conviction to experience other convictions if you like, and try them out and I appreciate that. The other thing that was interesting was your focus. You focus on strengths whereas I might follow the pain and work with that. You elaborate the alternative story, as you put it, and I thought "*that's interesting*" and I have changed some of my practice to develop alternative stories...

Without imposing narrative ideas on Kay, I had invited her to listen closely to clients' expressions and to use note-taking as a therapeutic strategy. I had shared the kind of notes I was taking in our supervision, mainly Kay's words, her agenda for the session, any expressions of her practice I thought were significant, improvements she had noticed in her practice, or specific feedback she wanted from me. A narrative preference for consulting clients, listening closely to their language-in-use, looking for alternative stories, and using co-inquiry practices, had opened up other possibilities for Kay's counselling practice.

**Kay:** Later on, having talked about these sorts of things in the research meetings, I now recognise that there are differences in counselling approaches and I feel much more able to ask about that and to think more clearly about my position and my preferred mode.

By illuminating differences in our theoretical orientations, rather than smoothing over or ignoring them, I had assisted Kay to recognise that other approaches to counselling existed—information that was previously unavailable to her. By naming, and by enacting difference in supervision, I had increased discursive options for Kay without diminishing relationality or criticising the counselling

approaches she was learning.

**Kay:** Because we were discussing counselling—not a particular practice but counselling generally—that made me feel stronger. I had to think about what I was doing, and then talk about it, and I felt more confident about myself becoming a counsellor. I became more confident about where I come from, why I work the way I do, and learning about my own process. That we were having conversations about theory and practice, and not just talking about what to do next with the client, means to me that you trusted me as a counsellor, and that has been very affirming for me.

Kay had shifted from viewing supervision as a means to “getting this technique right”, towards a view that supervision is a site for talking about metatheoretical concerns. While developmental, educative models of supervision may emphasise a more instrumental supervision, Kay’s expression that she felt “stronger” and “more confident about myself becoming a counsellor” *because* we were discussing theory and practice and not only “talking about what to do next with the client”, indicated to me that discussing theory in supervision with student counsellors is possible and expansive. Moving away from supervision as instrumental, Kay had experienced trust and affirmation as a student.

I now offer a more detailed discussion on the particular professional discourses shaping the practice stories in this chapter.

## **Discussion of this chapter**

### **Speaking difference in supervision with students**

Inviting practitioners to talk about discomfort in supervision does not mean they will accept the invitation, especially when they are invited to speak in the relationship where the discomfort is experienced. In theorising what might have made it possible for Kay to talk about her discomfort, I first point to the history of our relationship and the trust, openness, and goodwill that we had built up in the previous year. Fine and Turner (1997) suggested that the degree of disclosure in supervision is proportionate to the degree of goodwill and trust in the supervisory relationship. They claimed that the extent to which counsellors express an opinion in supervision is determined by “the workings of power located within the

relational context” (p.232). That Kay could speak to her experiences of our theoretical differences without fear of “injurious consequences” (Fine & Turner, 1997), contrasts with Webb and Wheeler’s (1998) research that found “supervisees in training” were significantly less able to disclose sensitive issues relating to their supervisor or supervision than non-trainees (p.517).

### **Clear supervision agreements**

Although Kay and I had previously worked together for one year in supervision, the lack of a clear working agreement for her final training year produced confusion over expectations and processes of supervision. From Kay’s reflections, it was clear that she would have appreciated more discussion on the process on supervision, and what she could expect for supervision in her final training year. In our first reflective/research meeting, I realised that supervision in her final year required me to alter my approach to supervision in order to attend to different aspects of her learning. My learning was not to take-for-granted shared understanding or agreement. Shared expectations, as West and Clarke (2004) suggested from their UK research, cannot be assumed. These authors found that counsellors and supervisors held different expectations of supervision:

Supervisees were probably looking for the Supervisor to listen, help them analyse and reflect, teach them something, and validate their work. Supervisors on the other hand have no work of their own to share. Their job is to listen well, empathise, make suggestions and connections, to validate and educate. Supervisees look for outcomes, Supervisors look at process. (p.24)

From a narrative perspective, supervision is considered a conversation where *both* process and outcomes are clearly negotiated and agreed upon. In supervision, taking up a position as a collaborative supervisor means that knowledge is not an object to be transmitted from “an expert” to “a student”, just as therapy is not something “done” to clients. The power relationships reproduced in developmental approaches to supervision can re-create a “dualism of expert practitioner and grateful apprentice” (Cornforth & Clairborne, 2008, p.697). Although describing herself as a “newby” and a “novice” in our first recorded supervision, Kay re-positioned herself as a knowing student, focussed on

achieving competence in the counselling approaches she was learning.

### **Bridging the theoretical gap**

As I tried to bring my interest in *what* Kay was doing in her practice, and *why* she was doing it, and the *effects* of particular practices, I invited Kay to move between landscapes of action and landscapes of meaning. My inquiry in our first supervision, **“What do you think your client got out of the dream work?”** was intended to move Kay into a reflexive space: to think about the effects of her practice for the client. I wanted to assist her to examine the products of her practice, i.e., what does her practice do, rather than to remain within familiar discourses of technique and process. My preference for this focus of inquiry is shaped by Foucault’s words: “We know what we do. We know why we do what we do. What we don’t know is what what we do does” (as cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p.187). Thus, by inviting Kay to move from talking about the *doing* of her practice to considering the *effects* of her practice, I was attending to a politic of client practice and reflexive practice. Consulting clients as to the effects of our practice is one way of reducing oppressive practices of power in the therapeutic relationship.

If we agree with the poststructuralist view that power is exercised through speaking positions available in discourse, then by inviting Kay to take up a speaking position as a consultant to my supervision practice, I created more agentic speaking positions for her. As Kay moved in her identity from student counsellor, towards “becoming a counsellor”, she experienced more confidence. As evidenced by various utterances presented in this chapter, both our subjectivities as supervisor and student were transitory, momentary, and fluid, illustrating the possibilities for discursive shifts in identity projects. Reflecting *on* practice while engaged *in* practice, I had heard more clearly how Kay experienced our theoretical differences, and as a result, I had stayed closer to Kay’s preferences for her counselling practice. Doing so meant that my feminist, political self was sometimes absent from supervision discourse. As Davies (1991) asserted, we are never free from the discourses that constitute us but we can experience degrees of agency, as we struggle to constitute ourselves through more preferred discourses.

## **The work of this chapter**

This chapter examined the effects for supervision with a student counsellor when theoretical orientations are non-aligned. Discursive dissonance and relational disconnection occurred when humanistic approaches to counselling and narrative approaches to supervision collided in particular moments in supervision talk. These moments of discursive dissonance are exacerbated when expectations are not made clear in a training supervision. Practices of critical reflexivity assisted my learning as supervisor, as I worked to create possibilities that were more congruent with Kay's preferred counselling modalities. Narrative practices of inquiry, externalising language, and closer listening supported me to assist Kay to move towards her preferred counselling practice and develop a stronger sense of professional identity. More agentic speaking positions were made available through the research project itself which indicated the value of video-taping supervision for collaborative review. The next chapter explores discursive dissonance in supervision when narratives of spirituality shape a counsellor's personal and professional identities.

## **Chapter 7: Keeping faith in supervision**

[Spirituality] has its problems with psychiatry and with many schools of counselling and psychotherapy, often being perceived as symptomatic of defensive escapism or pathology. But like sexuality, race and culture, politics, ecology, gender and other challenging issues, ‘the spiritual’ can no longer be ignored or marginalised in therapy. (Feltham, 2005, p.34)

### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the integration of spirituality and counselling in supervision. Louise and I (see page 65) had already worked together in the last two years of her counsellor training but that supervision had been shared with another student. Sharing supervision meant that there had been fewer opportunities for Louise to talk about her personal life or the depth of her spiritual faith. It was in the year of the research project that I came to understand the centrality of Louise’s Christian faith for her life and for her counselling practice. Louise identified herself as a “committed Christian”, counselling “through the spirit” using a Client-centred, Rogerian approach. While agreeing with Feltham (2005) and West (2004) that spirituality can no longer be marginalised or ignored in therapy, in supervision, I found myself grappling to respond to an account of spirituality that positioned Louise’s professional authority subordinate to divine authority. In this chapter, I explore how an ethic of hospitality and narrative maps of inquiry assisted me to speak into discourses of spirituality and humanistic counselling.

I present two episodes in this chapter where issues of spirituality arise in supervision and re-surface in the research meetings. The first episode illustrates an exchange in which I came to understand the significance of Louise’s faith for her personal life and her professional identity. In the subsequent research meeting, Louise reflects on supervision and expresses relief that she could “bring God into the supervision conversation”. I then offer a further reflexive commentary of the discursive shifts in positioning this conversation made possible. The second supervision episode illustrates my attempt to assist Louise to story a more agentic account of her practice and professional identity alongside her spiritual identity. The subsequent research meeting shows the effects of this supervision

conversation and the difficulty I experienced to hold a research focus. These two episodes demonstrate areas of my learning: to listen closely and generously to Louise's utterances and to support her to shape her professional practice while seeking to visibilise the operations of power in client practice. A reflexive commentary accompanies the extracts of data-texts, analysing how these discursive shifts were produced and illustrating how knowledge gained from research conversations was transported back into supervision conversations.

### **Supervision 1: Narratives of faith in supervision**

Louise had started this first recorded supervision by speaking of a challenge she experienced in her work with a particular client whose spiritual beliefs were those of a New Age philosophy. Louise expressed discomfort because, as a committed Christian, she did not agree with the clients' perspectives. It was at this point that I wondered if I had underestimated the importance of Louise's Christian faith for her counselling practice.

**Louise:** I have been thinking about my work with New Age clients and ideas about re-birthing and re-incarnation and all that, and because I am a committed Christian, I find it's a bit of a challenge to my own spirituality at times. Finding ways to hold that challenge and still work through the sessions is a bit hard.

Hearing Louise disclose that "finding ways to hold the challenge" when different spiritual beliefs were present in counselling, I was transported to thinking about my own research project. The challenge that Louise was referring to in her counselling practice, echoed a similar challenge that I had set out to explore in my research. How do I hold onto my preferred counselling knowledges when other counselling knowledges are present? I wondered whether participation in my study—researching the effects of non-aligned theoretical orientation for supervision—had prompted Louise to consider areas of discursive dissonance in her counselling practice. I decided not to make my wonderings visible at this point because I did not want to privilege research in supervision time. Instead, I invited Louise to speak more to the challenge she experienced in her practice.

**Ireni:** So would that be something that we might want to focus on

today...working with clients who hold different spiritual beliefs?

**Louise:** Yes, I think it would be really good to do that...for me, I see it as a clash, but something I manage at this point to contain and hold. I'm just wondering where you put that [clash]. For me, being a Christian is really important because I counsel through the spirit. I believe that everyone is made up of mind, body, and spirit and if they are not in sync it's going to affect the client as a whole.

**Ireni:** Would you like to talk about this now or is there anything else on top for you?

**Louise:** No, it would be good to talk about this actually. Since I completed my counsellor training, my life has come to a bit of a standstill...I don't have a lot of clients and I'm wondering if God might be telling me something about my future direction.

### **Border-crossing without a map or a compass**

In my response was hesitation and uncertainty for I was unsure how to position myself in Louise's spiritual discourse. I did not know what Louise meant when she said, "I counsel through the spirit" and instead of asking her, I experienced myself taking a step back. At the time, I thought I was giving Louise time to think about her agenda for supervision. On reflection, I recognised that I was also giving myself time to respond. It was as if a new territory had suddenly and unexpectedly opened up and taken me by surprise, just as in the first recorded supervision with Kay when discourses of "deep work" entered the conversation. I wondered if we might be "getting off track", or if I might lose my way navigating through such deeply personal narratives. I needed to reposition myself for this unexpected turn in the conversation and relocate myself in this new spiritual landscape. How might I integrate Louise's relationship with God into supervision? I wondered if Louise had experienced our previous supervision sessions a "bit of a challenge" also, as we had not agreed on the spiritual terms of "mind, body, and spirit" when working with clients.

As I will discuss at the end of this chapter, there has been a resurgence of spiritual matters in counselling. Research has found that the "religiosity gap" between secular counsellors and clients with religious/spiritual beliefs was bridgeable (Mayers, Leavey, Vallianatou, & Barker, 2007). However, at this point, I did not



feel well positioned to bridge the gap opening up between Louise and me. I knew little about counselling on the spiritual terms that Louise was prescribing and I wondered if she might call me into a position of agreement with such terms. Slowing the conversation down, I asked Louise again about the direction for our supervision.

**Ireni:** Is this a good direction for us to take in today's supervision—your relationship with God and the future direction of your counselling practice?

**Louise:** Yes...if that's OK to talk about in supervision...it's a big one for me...it's a big one for supervision...what does the future hold? Up to this point I have been obedient to God...so what now? I am also reflecting...*“what's this time trying to say to me?”* Just sitting, being still...trusting...I know that God will lead and guide me...it is God's time.

### **Complexities of power relations in dialogues of the divine**

In her speaking, Louise had invoked the authority of a divine power, thus introducing another complexity of power relations into our conversation. I was now positioned as a supervisor in relation to a higher authority. Ruth Penny (2009), a New Zealand counsellor who also identified as a Christian, posed questions about how to “manage the power dynamic that comes into the room” (p.20) when clients bring a divine authority into the conversation. She asked how counsellors might challenge spiritual beliefs if those beliefs seemed to be having oppressive or limiting effects for clients, and she asked “how do we know if challenging such beliefs is in a client's best interest” (p.20). In a supervision context, I hold responsibility to question how a counsellor's strong beliefs might be intruding on her practice, or possibly limiting for her clients. With Louise, I wanted to explore her understandings of “obedience” that I interpreted from her utterances but I did not want to challenge her relationship with her God in doing so. As supervisor, I wanted to invite Louise to reflect on *how* her beliefs of “obedience” and “just sitting” and “being still” might position her as a woman in a gendered and professional world.

I recognise that my response to Louise's speaking is only one of many possible readings. When Louise referred to God leading and guiding her, I was more

present to the positioning these words produced: in other words, the relation between her professional and personal agency and God's authority. Informed by my feminist understandings of patriarchal discourse, I found myself moving away from a restrictive kind of spirituality based on experiences of oppression within society's patriarchal framework. I was reflecting on, what seemed to me, an absence of personal authority in Louise's speaking. I reminded myself that I needed to suspend my assumptions and preconceptions and listen carefully for what those terms meant for Louise. Moving closer to Louise's speaking, I offered a reflective summary and inquiry. I wanted to convey to Louise that it was permissible for her to talk about spiritual matters, even if I was unsure of the direction the conversation might take.

**Ireni:** So, Louise, are you saying that this is a time for reflection and finding out what God wants you to do...about finding direction for the next phase of your life?

**Louise:** Yes, and trusting in God... [Long pause]

**Ireni:** When you are trusting in God, what is happening for you, Louise, and for your counselling practice?

**Louise:** When I am trusting God, I am still and pulled back into a place of peace...I take time to listen to clients...I can focus on their issues...I have successful sessions...I only have a few clients at the moment....it's as if God has given me this time to get ready...to de-clutter my house and prepare for change... to get ready for the next bit [Louise continued her story of preparing for change]

**Ireni:** What do you think might be coming up for you? What do you imagine the next bit looks like? Are you getting any clarity around that or...

**Louise:** I just put all my dreams, and hopes before Him. I need to be obedient to God, to be still and know He is in control of my life... [Long pause]

**Ireni:** Can you say more about your hopes and dreams, Louise?

In the above exchange, I wanted to tailor my inquiry in ways that would bring Louise's presence forward in the conversation. It seemed that my questions,

intended to bring forward Louise's authority, seemed to lead back to divine authority. Focusing my inquiry on to Louise's hopes and dreams brings me to my next theoretical point.

### **Working for agentic positioning in supervision**

My intention in the above exchange was to invite Louise to take up a position as a storying subject. For example, I had asked: "when *you* are trusting in God", and "what is happening for *you*", and "*your* counselling practice". Louise was clearly visible in the grammar of her reply: "*I* take time to listen...*I* can focus...*I* have successful sessions". Then, in the same utterance, she repositioned herself as a subjected self by saying: "I need to be obedient to God". On Foucauldian terms, we are both a subject *of* discourse and subjected *to* discourse. Within the spiritual discourse shaping supervision talk, I, too, was subjected to the terms of that discourse and experienced a loss of my authority. As discussed in Chapter 3, how we chose to respond to the discourses shaping us as particular kinds of people is a matter of agency.

From a narrative perspective, rich accounts of identity are possible in the realm of intentional states of identity where commitments, values, hopes and dreams are storied (Morgan, 2002; White, 2007). I hoped that by asking Louise to speak about her hopes and dreams, we would move towards more commonly shared ground. At the same time, I was genuinely interested in what Louise thought the future held for her. I hoped that by rescuing Louise's "hopes and dreams" from the conversation, and making meaning of them through further inquiry, we might develop richer accounts of possibilities for her life and her counselling practice.

In response to my inquiry, Louise went on to explain that she hoped one day to combine her Christian faith with counselling. She talked of her love of travel and hoped that an opportunity might arise where she could enjoy these two different aspects in her life. In these utterances, I noticed Louise developing a stronger tone of voice and a sense of excitement in her voice. White (Duvall & Young, 2009) suggested that "if we [therapists] establish the right circumstances then we witness transportation" (p.16). When people find ways of proceeding in their lives that are in harmony with their commitments and intentions, they are transported to another place. As Louise spoke of her hopes and dreams I noticed a shift in the

conversational atmosphere. I witnessed Louise becoming excited and inspired about possibilities for her future in ways that were in harmony with her spiritual commitments and values. When Louise had finished speaking, I asked:

**Ireni:** What do you think God is telling you about your future direction?

**Louise:** I don't know...but something big is coming up... [Pause]

**Ireni:** Do you see some sort of integration happening...perhaps... counselling and mission work coming together?

**Louise:** Definitely, that would be my dream [Louise continues to express ideas for her future work]...but God might have other plans, I don't know.

**Ireni:** And how have you assisted God in these plans, Louise?

**Louise:** By working hard and achieving my goals...and I have worked very hard to get where I am today...

**Ireni:** Would you like to talk more about some of the ways you've achieved your goals? I would be interested to know more about that...

### **Double-listening for entry points into other storylines**

My inquiry was shaped by curiosity about Louise's participation in, and intentions for, her own life. Every expression of experience offers possibilities for rich story development (White, 2007). In Louise's words, "I have worked very hard", I heard another possible entry point for a new line of inquiry. As we continued our conversation, Louise spoke of her family of origin difficulties and the responsibilities and "hard times" she experienced growing up. As Louise talked, I came to understand better the significance of her spiritual faith. Louise spoke to her belief that "without God's saving grace", she did not think she would be where she was today. As a witness to Louise's life story, I wondered how I might bring forward Louise's strengths and resources; how I might invite Louise to talk about her lived experiences in ways that would not discount her belief in "God's saving grace". I asked Louise what knowledges, skills, and qualities helped her survive such "hard times". She replied "perseverance, tenacity and hard work" had contributed to her survival and her academic success. Louise expressed how her academic and professional success had been achieved, "against all odds", and that God had "played a big part in my life" and that she "couldn't have done it without Him". Continuing to make meaning in the landscape of identity, I asked:

**Ireni:** What does all this tell you about yourself Louise, that you have achieved so much already in your life?

**Louise:** It tells me that I can work hard to achieve the things that are important to me in life... that I am dependable and reliable...if I say I am going to do something, I will do it...I show commitment to my family and friends...

At this point, we now had two stories interweaving on more equal terms than at the start of our conversation. Re-authoring a story of achievement had not excluded or diminished the story of divine intervention in Louise's life. I had worked intentionally to assist Louise in storying herself not only in terms of a divine authority but on the terms of her personal authority.

Weaving between personal stories of faith and professional stories, I was not sure that I had assisted Louise with the practice dilemma she had brought to supervision. I was looking forward to hearing her reflections at our research meeting. I now provide data-texts from the subsequent research meeting. In this research conversation, I found myself once again searching for ways to offer Louise agentic speaking positions and to position myself as agentic researcher.

### **Research Meeting 1: Reflections on supervision**

I started this meeting by asking Louise what interested her when she watched the DVD of our supervision.

**Louise:** Well, the first thing I have to say is that talking about God was really important. When you ask me about God, you're asking me about me, my beliefs and my values...it has been huge for me because, let's face it, it's not an everyday thing that you can talk about and it's been a big relief for me that we can talk about God in supervision.

I was immediately relieved to hear that Louise had experienced permission to talk about her spiritual faith in supervision. I was concerned that my subtextual uncertainty and hesitation in supervision might have been interpreted as disapproval. From my reading of the literature, many counsellors feel inhibited to talk about spiritual matters in supervision (see for example, Gubi, 2007; West,

2000). Counsellors in Gubi's (2007) study felt they could not take matters of a spiritual nature to supervision and experienced "loneliness" and "alienation" in supervision. From her words, Louise had experienced *herself* very much present in supervision when talking about God. Talking about God had been a "huge relief" for Louise and had allowed her to bring her beliefs and values into supervision.

**Ireni:** I am really pleased to hear that Louise...was there anything in particular that made this possible?

**Louise:** I've got written here [consulting her notes]... *"The type of questioning really helped me to reflect on deep thoughts and feelings...the end of one phase and the beginning of another and I am getting ready... I am getting organised."* And then, I've got here *"but organised for what?"* So that is the big question... [Pause]...the whole conversation enlightened me quite a lot...

I was pleased to hear that supervision had assisted Louise to reflect on "deep thoughts and feelings". My reticence to enter discourses of "deep work" with Kay in Chapter 6 was that we might end up speculating about her client's process, not Kay's. In supervision with Louise, it was Louise's process that had been centred in the conversation, not a client's. As researcher, I was interested in what my inquiry in supervision had made possible for Louise. At the same time, I experienced a tension that by exploring "enlightenment", we might end up engaging in more in a supervisory inquiry than a research inquiry. With some trepidation I asked

**Ireni:** Can you say a bit more about that, Louise? What are you more enlightened about?

**Louise:** Well, as I counsel from a Christian aspect, spiritually God is changing and enlightening me in body, mind and spirit...[consulting her notes] and I've got here *"to be truly focussed and tuned, in mind, body, and spirit"*...that's why I am de-cluttering and cleaning up my house...

I was aware that my responses "Can you say a bit more?" and "What are you enlightened about?" were familiar supervision inquiries and not research inquiries.

On reflection, I realised that I needed to shape my questions in this research conversation so that my research interests were better served. For example, a question such as “What type of questions are you referring to?” might have taken the research conversation further. I was now facing a dilemma between turning the conversation back to my research agenda, or following the spiritual direction raised by Louise’s reflections and my responses.

**Ireni:** So let me just clarify with you, Louise. Are you saying that when you reflected on our supervision, you came to a realisation that the actions you were taking at the moment were linked to changes you are experiencing in your spiritual life?

**Louise:** Yeah...they were there, but I couldn’t piece it together... and then I thought, when watching myself on the tape, “*Why was that thought there?*” So, a lot of questioning going on for me, in supervision and afterwards...It must have been on the surface for all of a sudden to be talking about “tidying up”. I didn’t realise it at the time at all. I thought “*OK, so we have a bit of a transition going on here from finishing my counselling training... and now I am waiting for clients to come rushing to me...*” but no, that’s not happening, instead it is a growing time... a time to be with myself, reflecting, forgiving and moving on...

Once again, I heard the conversation take a turn towards a supervisory focus. I was caught between wanting to assist Louise to continue making sense of this “transition time” and gathering data for my research questions. I wondered what it might be that Louise was “reflecting on, forgiving and moving on” from. As supervisor, I would have asked more about Louise’s personal story: as researcher I needed to keep focused.

**Ireni:** How did my questions in supervision help you to “piece together” this “transition” time, Louise?

**Louise:** I realised from our conversation that I have worked darn hard to get here and not many people know about my story and how hard it’s been....I’ve got to put it down to God, I do, but to my own help as well. So that was a huge realisation for me.

**Ireni:** How did our supervision conversation help you, Louise, to realise

your own contribution to your life and work?

**Louise:** ... well, if you hadn't asked certain questions, we wouldn't have touched on this, [plans for the future], so you see, I think they [questions] were really important.

**Ireni:** Can you tell me what those questions were that were really important, Louise?

Although the type of inquiry I had offered in supervision had invited Louise to consider her contribution to her own life, I felt a sense of discomfort arising from my persistence in asking Louise for examples of my supervision practice that had been helpful. It was as though I was centering my supervision practice over her personal and spiritual "realisations". As I was coming to understand, practitioner-action-research was a complex and complicated endeavour. I recognised that my struggle to ask research questions was connected to a fear of inviting "applause" (see Chapter 4 for applause/acknowledgement discussion). In this moment, I was reaching to make the opportunities offered by narrative inquiry more visible, without centering myself as supervisor. Making visible the invisible, and opening up talk about future possibilities, my inquiry in supervision seemed to have produced a discursive shift for Louise.

**Louise:** Well, here's one: **"so what does that tell you about counselling as your work?"** And I wrote down [consulting her notes], *"well, it tells me that I can connect with my clients and that I can acknowledge their good traits and who they are... and I can make a difference in people's lives"*. Then you asked me **"is this about finding direction for the next phase of your life"** and **"what do you imagine the next bit looks like?"** That was another significant question for me ... and when you asked **"how does counselling and mission work come together?"** I just thought Wow! There were a number of questions like that that were so meaningful for me. In fact the whole conversation was good for me because a lot of my dreams are tied up with who I am...and I found supervision very affirming...

Although Louise had understood the success in her life to be the work of God—



“I’ve got to put it down to God”—she was now also acknowledging the effects of her own efforts and hard work. Recognising the extent of her own contribution to her life and her achievements had been a major discovery for Louise, similar to a spiritual “enlightenment”. I had tried to combine both the supervision talk, on which we were reflecting, and the discoveries Louise was making in the reflective/research talk. By listening closely and creating a climate of hospitality in supervision, even although I was unsure about the direction and outcomes of the conversation, my inquiry had opened up possibilities for richer accounts of personal and professional authority for Louise.

## **Supervision 2: Linking spiritual and professional narratives**

In this extract from our second recorded supervision, I show how I worked to integrate Louise’s spiritual faith with a counselling practice event she brought to supervision. Louise had expressed a sense of “stuckness” in her work with a particular client, Joanne, whom she had been seeing for some time. Louise had brought her work with Joanne to supervision on several occasions and this particular practice review was focussed on helping Joanne to “move forward”. Louise had also spoken in past supervision of the similarity between Joanne’s lived experiences and her own. In this supervision, my concern was that the similarity between Louise’s story and her client’s story might invite Louise to offer reassurance or spiritual guidance.

**Ireni:** So, Louise, you feel points of connection between Joanne’s story and your own story...with what has happened in your life?

**Louise:** Yes, I do... our lives are very similar and Joanne is going through similar changes in her life to what I went through. She has very negative beliefs about herself...I have been using TA [Transactional Analysis] to encourage compassion for her Inner Child...A lot of damage has been done...I can relate to that. I have shared a bit about my experiences...she keeps so busy so she doesn’t have to listen to the little voice inside. Counselling is like layers of the onion...peeling away, affirming her grief, telling her it’s perfectly natural to feel like this...she is so negative about herself...

In hearing this account that “a lot of damage has been done”, I experienced a strong sense of dissonance. My internal response was one of resistance to discourses of damage. I do not mean to suggest that people do not experience emotional or psychological pain from their lived experiences of trauma, abuse, or neglect. It is the idea of permanent or deeply hidden damage that requires years of therapy that I object to. In my experience, therapists can inadvertently extend stories of trauma by “peeling the layers of the onion” or can re-traumatise a person through prolonged storying of painful experiences. Discourses of “psychological damage” can lead to pathologising descriptions and many years in “recovery”. I wanted to trouble this interpretation Louise was making of her client’s experiences but I was hesitant to do so as I understood that these ideas were powerfully shaping of Louise’s understanding of her own lived experiences. I was reluctant to problematise, or trouble, ideas that were so closely linked to how Louise understood the oppressive effects of her own history. My preference in therapy is to thicken stories of survival, competence, connection and achievement by focussing on other experiences outside a “damaged” storyline. This was a moment, a discursive intersection, when I struggled whether to offer what I considered more effective counselling strategies for Louise’s work with her client, or whether to withhold my preferred practices.

Furthermore, I was disturbed by the possibility that because Louise had attributed meanings to her client’s experiences, which were similar to her own she may want to disclose her spiritual experiences to her client. When students and new counsellors experience over-involvement and a strong identification with clients, similarity may fuel an inclination to give specific and strong advice (Todd & Wade, 2004). Informed by this thinking, I asked Louise:

**Ireni:** How much of Joanne’s story is similar to your own, Louise?

**Louise:** Oh, a lot, there is a bit of a parallel process going on actually...in fact I have shared a bit about myself...about my experience in my family [...] I told Joanne that she had “gifts” and this acknowledgement brought tears to her eyes. I felt a spiritual connection to her in that moment.

In Chapter 5, I showed how I had supported Claire’s disclosure of a personal experience which was similar to her client, on the premise that Claire was

positioning herself in a feminist ethics of care. With Louise, in this moment, I did not hold a similar conviction that self-disclosure would be in her client's best interests. Instead, I experienced a sense of caution and a disinclination to support Louise's disclosure of her personal and spiritual experiences to her client. I suggest my unwillingness was connected to a concern that the power relations invoked by a divine authority, plus the already inherent power relations in the counsellor/client relation, might have a limiting effect for the client's agency. In other words, when counsellors share financial, relational, or spiritual strategies which worked for them, how might clients speak freely against adopting such strategies for their own lives?

Furthermore, in supervision with Claire, I had permission from our mutual agreement to name the differences between a narrative approach to therapy and a humanistic, Client-centred approach. I had no such agreement with Louise for she had not requested a narrative focus in supervision. In Davies et al.'s (2006) terms, I did not have permission to "render visible the discursive powers of particular discourses and the modes of subject(ion) they entail" (p.99). Claire's reflective question, "Oh god, what sort of counsellor are you?" invited me to stand beside her and unpack the discourses producing her identity as a counsellor-in-error.

I wondered what kind of "spiritual connection" Louise felt with her client. My next inquiry contained a reflection that I hoped would be gentle and affirming of Louise's skill, and also troubling.

**Ireni:** How are you able to make that spiritual connection with Joanne and still keep her story and your story separate? I'm wondering how we use our position as counsellors to share with clients without imposing. What helps us to keep the balance do you think?

I intentionally positioned myself collaboratively alongside Louise by my use of the "collective-we", while also taking up a subtle teaching position. The effects of counsellor disclosure for clients, as I discussed in Chapter 5, need to be considered carefully. As counsellors and supervisors, I consider we hold a position in relation to "theory, authority, expertise and technology" (Doan, 2004, p.27) that can override others' contributions to their own life narratives. In the

sub-text of my speaking was an invitation for Louise to reflect on whether the meanings she was making of her client's story were overly shaped by the meanings she had made of her own painful experiences. In response to my question, Louise replied:

**Louise:** Being real, being myself...having wisdom to know what to share with clients and what not to... [Pause]

**Ireni:** Are there any specific skills you draw on, Louise, to enable that wisdom?

I understood Louise's words "being real", being myself", were located in discourses of essentialist, humanistic psychologies. I decided to pick up Louise's expression "having wisdom" and tried to develop that storyline by asking her to identify the skills that supported a practice of discernment. My intention was to develop a richer account of Louise's skills, which alongside prayer, might enhance Louise's authority in her professional practice. I wanted to bring Louise's authorship forward in the conversation. However, Louise's reply continued to position us in spiritual discourse.

**Louise:** Intuition, insightfulness, and perceptiveness...three things I pray for every day. They are in me but I don't always use them.

While qualities of "intuition, insightfulness, and perceptiveness" are worthy attributes, I was looking for a reply emphasising practice based on skilful work. On Louise's terms, these skills were given by a higher authority, through prayer, which I considered lessened Louise's *authority* as a moral agent for her practice. I felt that our supervision conversation had again arrived at place where I lacked a clear direction to assist Louise to story her practice or her professional identity.

Leaving this place of disturbance aside, I returned to the original practice dilemma Louise brought to supervision, namely, how to assist her client Joanne, to move forward. In response to the client's "negative beliefs about herself", I decided to introduce the idea of outsider witnessing practices (White, 2007). Calling on other relationships or people in our lives to offer counter-stories to the ones we hold about ourselves can be powerfully affirming.

**Ireni:** Is there anyone else in Joanne's life that could counteract those negative beliefs she holds about herself?

**Louise:** Well...she is estranged from her parents and has no siblings or close friends. She never talks about anyone close to her...she has only ever mentioned her dogs and how close she feels to them.

**Ireni:** Okay... then seen through the eyes of her dogs, what would Joanne say about herself? What stories would they have to tell about her; about the way she cares for them? What do you think she means to her dogs?

**Louise:** You know, [dawning realisation] I never thought of asking her that...but those dogs love her I'm sure! [Excited tone]

That idea that through the eyes of her dogs, Joanne might see herself differently resonated for Louise. Informing my question was a relational view of identity as a social achievement (Gergen, 1994). From a social constructionist perspective, who we are "is not dependent on our being but on the politics of our relationships" (May, 2005, p.9). Joanne's loving relationships with her pets, might offer her different ways of knowing herself; a self that is caring, nurturing, and valued. As outsider-witnesses to Joanne's life, her dogs might be a resource that would offer Louise a possible new direction for inquiry in her counselling practice.

As we continued to co-construct the types of questions Louise might ask Joanne next time she saw her for counselling, I offered my views that counselling is about helping persons to make their own sense of *their* world, according to what is meaningful and precious to *them*. I also wondered how Louise might reply to similar relational questions about her identity. For example, what might God think of Louise's hard work and contribution to her life's achievements? What might God say about Louise's commitments and intentions for her counselling practice, and for her hopes for the future? In our next supervision session, not recorded for the purposes of this research study, I did ask Louise these internalised other questions (Epston, 1993) as my confidence with "bringing God into supervision" increased. The learning I was gaining from working with Louise was to embark on more courageous conversations and to explore uncharted domains in my supervision practice. As supervision unfolded, I became more confident about

finding ways to speak into those spaces of discomfort by staying curious and drawing on narrative practices of inquiry. I now move to the second research meeting which followed the above supervision session one month later.

## **Research Meeting 2: Reflections on supervision**

In this research meeting, Louise had noticed particular questions in supervision that had assisted her to reflect more on the connection between her professional, personal and spiritual narratives.

**Louise:** We were talking about my client having experienced deep damage and I thought to myself “*You can project onto your client while you are going through your own process*”. And you asked **“do I feel those points of connection between my client and my own story about what has happened in my own life?”** Because I said, “*definitely, I do*”. It was a bit of a parallel process for me. And yes, I discussed it actually with the client. I said, “*Look some points of interest in your story...are touching my own*” and we acknowledged that and once we had acknowledged that we had room to move...

Another great question was **“How do we use our position as counsellors to share with clients without imposing? What helps us to keep the balance do you think?”** And you said that for you it was about **“a client making sense of her own experience”** and **“it’s about Joanne making meaning the way she wants to be in the world”** and that’s exactly what it’s about [*excited tone*] and it is so important...and those questions really spoke to me because it *is* about identity...because that’s just where I’m at this time in my life...and I thought “*isn’t that just great!*” That was a very profound moment for me and very profound questions...

A “collective-we” positioning in supervision had invited Louise to reflect on the possibilities of “projecting” her own “process” onto a client. Our conversation in supervision had alerted Louise to the potential for enacting practices of imposition. Louise was now asking herself previously unasked questions about the relationship between her lived experiences and clients’ lived experiences and the place of disclosure in professional practice. I considered Louise’s reflexive wonderings as a discursive shift; a move away from a single-storied description

towards a more multi-storied description of her practice. Although it was her client we had been discussing, Louise had re-considered her own identity, acknowledging that our conversation had produced a “profound” experience for her identity.

**Ireni:** So...those questions in supervision...they helped you in thinking about your own identity as well as the client's?

**Louise:** Yes, because when you asked me: **“what skills do I bring to enable that wisdom?”** that question helped me access both my own feelings and my skills about dealing with my own trauma...and I was able to think about how I was feeling in someone else's grief. It was a very good question for me because I am really ascertaining more of myself, more of my own identity... So your question invited a self-reflection and it kind of brought me down to the humanity side of things, but from a professional perspective as well.

Through supervision and through watching the DVD, Louise had made connections between her client's story and her own story in ways that encompassed a spiritual understanding along with a “professional perspective”. I had managed to connect Louise's spiritual, personal and professional knowledges in ways that extended her counselling practice without diminishing her relationship with God. By inviting Louise to reflect on how her spiritual life and her professional life shaped each other, I had assisted Louise to reflect on her own identity as an evolving project. Louise continued:

Now, [*consulting her notes*], I have got here “*a great question you asked for it got me to see outside of my practice*”. It was: **“who else in Joanne's life might be able to counteract the negative beliefs that she has about herself?** So this question helped me use Joanne's own belief system, outside of herself. Another very useful resource to draw on concerning identity...it is about us in relation to others. It helped me reflect more on how I could take that example of how Joanne's dogs see her; what would they say about her, and use it with other clients in the future. I got Joanne to write down at least two or three positive affirmations through that, and that was really successful... so that was a useful tool.

Supervision had informed Louise's thinking about identity and her counselling practice differently. I now move to the third and final research meeting where I had asked Louise questions about the overall research study.

### **Research Meeting 3: The spiritual is professional**

In our third and final research meeting, I started by asking Louise how she had experienced supervision as a committed Christian and whether there has been a sense of restriction for her.

**Ireni:** As you know Louise, my research was looking at how different ideas and counselling approaches come together in supervision. I was wondering if there times when you felt restrained from speaking. Perhaps times when you might have preferred to go to a Christian supervisor.

**Louise:** No, there was nothing I felt I would not talk to you about...What I like about your style of supervision is that you make room for me in a way that is valid. I feel we are equal and yet I am aware of your position and I am aware of mine... Supervision really got me thinking about why I chose counselling...you asked how my life experiences affected my counselling practice and they do, in a big way... because depending on our worldview, we paint a story in particular ways...but it is how we *use* those experiences that really came across for me...

In her speaking, Louise was calling on different metaphors in accounting for her counselling practice. Supervision had helped Louise to consider the stories that were shaping of her practice by making "room" for her. By naming the accounts from which she viewed the world, Louise was more aware of how our worldviews "paint" particular stories over others.

**Louise:** When I realised it was our last research meeting, I felt a sense of sadness...it has been so very fulfilling for me...I felt they were lovely questions that you are asking me, you know, about my relationship with God...I felt they were relevant to my clients as well. For example, we were talking about a client moving from weekly to fortnightly sessions and you asked me if it would be useful to explore how I contributed to that shift for her, or what I did for this change to come about. And I thought,



*excellent question because I hadn't really thought about that. I knew there was progress being made but to actually pinpoint it...I asked myself, so what did I say or do for this process to come about? That was a really, really helpful ...*

Supervision had assisted Louise to take up a position as a “moral agent” (Crocket, 2001); to “pinpoint” or articulate how she had assisted a client to progress. My use of narrative methods of inquiry had helped Louise make meaning of her practice in generative ways.

**Ireni:** In what way do you think supervision has contributed to your professional development Louise?

**Louise:** Supervision has helped me change shape...changed my shape of who I am.

**Ireni:** Can you say a bit more about what you mean by “changed your shape”, Louise? How has supervision changed your shape?

**Louise:** It is about developing in my maturity. I feel that I have become more mature as a growing counsellor...I appreciated all your questions...they were all very thought-provoking ...for example, we were talking about how I am building trust with our clients and you asked me: **“how am I coming to know that knowledge”**. And I thought about this, I thought about it quite long and hard and I took myself outside of that question and I was looking in at it. And I came to the conclusion that I am learning how to balance my professional and personal focus.

Without naming it as such, Louise was engaging in the social construction of her reality, her knowing by looking “long and hard” at how she was coming to know particular knowledges. Instead of taking-for-granted that she was able to build trusting relationships with clients, Louise she was now accounting for this event as a skill. Words, meanings, talk, stories—discourses employed in supervision—had worked to shape Louise’s professional practice and her identity.

**Ireni:** Louise, could you comment on the effects of our different counselling approaches, was that a problem for supervision?

**Louise:** Not, not really because most of what we needed to understand

when I was training came from the text books...I found your style very creative and intriguing...part of Narrative Therapy, I suppose, asking questions....they were all such interesting questions. Here's another one [consulting her notes], we were talking about change and how I have changed my life and you asked **“so this new you, the way you are handling your past now, it seems different from the way you used to handle it. What does this tell you about yourself?”** That was a very good question for me, and for clients. I think I am a very different person now, I am still ascertaining my identity but supervision has helped me to do that.

From her speaking, I understood that asking questions in counselling was something new for Louise. It seemed that a narrative inquiry focus was not problematic for her. My landscape of identity question, “what does this tell you about yourself?” had opened up a space for Louise to consider herself “a very different person now”. The centrality she placed on her spiritual faith has not been diminished by supervision; arguably, supervision had enhanced her spiritual faith. Alongside her faith, other ideas were taking shape. In narrative practice, personal experiences are used to story rich accounts of professional identity. Louise was now storying her professional identity as an on-going endeavour—“I don't think I have discovered my identity yet”—an identity that is not restricted to a prescriptive religious identity. Experiencing permission to talk about her spiritual beliefs and her relationship with God in supervision, Louise could reflect on her client practice and on her own developing professional identity in a climate of safety and trust.

Working with Louise greatly enhanced my supervision practice. At the start of our supervision, I was unsure how to speak into the patriarchal, spiritual discourses shaping her spiritual faith and into the humanistic, theoretical ideas shaping her counselling practice. I grapple with speaking into a posture of certainty that sometimes accompanies deeply held spiritual beliefs. My preference is for a posture of spiritual uncertainty and multi-storied accounts of faith and this can create dissonance with spiritual certainty and single-storied accounts. I am not saying that counsellors cannot hold positions of certainty in matters of faith, or

beliefs, values and ethics: it is how we speak our certainty that I draw attention to. As articulated by Griffith (1995): “It is the therapist’s certainty that oppresses and constrains opportunities to hear the story as the client experiences it” (p.123). I suggest that the discursive shifts Louise and I experienced in supervision occurred as a result of us both moving away from positions of certainty and towards positions of contingency.

## **Discussion of this chapter**

### **Naming the spiritual in supervision**

In this discussion, I make a distinction between Person-Centred counselling, which has integrated Christian spirituality, and Christian counselling which centres Christian ideology as its primary perspective. Studies have shown a growth in a spiritual dimension in peoples’ lives generally (Gubi, 2008) and therefore, it is not unusual for counselling to pay more attention to spiritual matters as part of a holistic, Person-Centred approach. However, my concern in supervision with Louise was how to speak to her spirituality, understood not on the terms of a humanistic spirituality but on the terms of a deeply held, personal spirituality. To assist me in finding speaking positions in Louise’s spiritual discourse, I consulted the literature on spirituality and supervision. I found that although spirituality has been given attention in counselling literature (see for example, Eriksen, Marston, & Korte, 2002; Frame, 2003; Griffith & Griffith, 2002; Gubi, 2008; Mayers et al., 2007; Miller, 2002; Moodley & West, 2005; Standard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000; Thorne, 1998; Walsh, 1999), it is only recently that spirituality has surfaced in the supervision literature (Gubi, 2007; West, 2000).

### **Bridging the “religiosity” gap**

According to a study by Mayers, Leavey, Vallianatou, and Barker (2007), the experience of having psychological distress and the process of receiving therapy were both perceived as strengthening to faith and ultimately part of a spiritual journey. Furthermore, contrary to expectations, a match between the spirituality or religious affiliation of the therapist and client was not considered important. However, while there has been an “escalation in the number of clients presenting themselves with spiritual issues” (Thorne, 2001, p.435), there are few studies

researching the complexities arising in supervision when counsellors who are committed Christians are working with secular supervisors. From his research findings, Peter Gubi (2007) urged supervisors to engage in “appropriate theoretical consideration and personal challenge” (p.120) with counsellors who bring their spiritual beliefs into their professional practice but provides little in the way of practice examples. While I agree that supervision is the legitimate place for counsellors to talk about their spiritual beliefs, I often experienced myself disadvantaged as supervisor in relation to the divine authority invoked in supervision.

From his research over many years, West (2006) reported that some counsellors felt “unable to be open” (p.234), or be direct with their supervisors about incorporating spiritual practices, such as the use of prayer, into their counselling. Gubi (2007) suggested that if counsellors feel accepted, able, and open to exploring all aspects of their counselling work, then “this openness can work to prevent unethical practice, protect the client, and enable consistency of work” (p.114). It was important then, that Louise felt welcomed to discuss her spirituality in supervision so that matters of ethical practice could be discussed. Gubi found that counsellors who integrated prayer into their counselling were almost all reluctant to discuss this aspect of their practice with their supervisor. Fear of being adversely judged, or considered acting unethically, restrained them from speaking about spiritual matters. Likewise, Katherine Souza (2002) an American counsellor educator, found that students in her study reported bad experiences when giving “voice” to their spiritual values in supervision. Unlike the counsellors in Gubi’s (2007) study, Louise did feel confident to bring her spirituality into supervision. However, creating space for Louise to give “voice” to her spiritual experiences in supervision required me to hold the tension between totally accepting her worldview and keeping space open for other views.

### **Creating a culture of hospitality**

Recommendations from the supervision literature resonated with my already existing narrative preference for collaborative practice (Paré & Lerner, 2004) and my desire to create a culture of hospitality and welcome for people to talk about matters of a personal nature in supervision (White, 1997). In the context of counselling, Melissa Griffiths and James Griffiths (2002) recommended that an

ethos of hospitality, careful listening, and openness assists clients to feel safe to talk about spiritual issues:

Opening conversation to talk about spirituality or religion depends less on knowing what questions to ask and more on careful listening to what people spontaneously speak about when they feel safe and respected.  
(p.45)

From a narrative perspective, storying the visible in a person's life encourages a knowing formation of the self (White, 2000). In supervision, I tried to name the visible in Louise's life—her achievements, her success, her deep respect and caring for clients. I sought to extend her counselling practice without marginalising or discounting what was precious to her. As a compassionate witness to Louise's own life stories, I worked to create a space in supervision where she could speak freely about her spirituality. As supervisor, I moved between counsellor/teacher/witness positions as I sought to expand discursive options for Louise.

### **Critical reflexivity**

In this process, the assumptions I held about professional practice became more visible to me. Why was it, I wondered, that I accorded importance to a feminist discourse, yet was uneasy to accord the same privilege to a committed Christian discourse? On further reflection, I recognised it is the posture of *certainity* that I move away from. I suggest when certainty is supported by a divine authority the power relations in counselling are more complex and influential. A client, perhaps struggling with vulnerability or uncertainty at the time of counselling, is called into relation with the professional authority of the counsellor, and the divine authority of a higher power. These complex power relations behoves a counsellor to take extra care in privileging the clients' authority in their preferred life narratives. Philip Culbertson (2009) asked similar questions to those I was grappling with in this chapter. For counsellors who hold Christian beliefs working with Christian clients, he asked:

How do we negotiate and manage the presence of our own personal and religious values in the counselling relationship? How do we manage

situations in which our Christian values or Christian hermeneutics will disappoint or even anger our Christian clients? What is the point at which a clash between our personal values as counsellors and a client's personal values becomes an issue of professional ethics? These and similar questions seem to be hardly addressed in the counselling and psychotherapy literature. (p.7)

It is these kinds of ethical questions that I continue to struggle with in supervision. Where is the point at which a “clash” between values of agency and authority and belief in divine authority becomes a matter of professional ethics? I am not singling out spirituality in this discussion. Any “fundamental” discourse would raise similar questions for me, whether religious, social or political. Ideology of any kind has effects for professional practice: it is how ideology shapes our discourse in counselling and supervision that matters.

From the discursive dissonance arising in supervision with Louise, I have learned ways to position myself more comfortably in difference by suspending my own knowing. Through practices of critical reflexivity, I examined my uncertainty and trepidation to speak difference in supervision. Ethics of hospitality and care created a culture of genuine respect, acceptance and openness in both our supervision and research meetings. Using narrative practices of inquiry, re-authoring conversations and outsider-witnessing, I found ways to support Louise to develop her counselling practice while not marginalising her spirituality.

### **The work of this chapter**

This chapter examined discursive dissonance arising in supervision when spiritual discourses are integral to a counsellor professional practice and identity. It demonstrated how an ethic of hospitality worked to address issues of responsibility and the complex power relations when divine authority is invoked. Supervision incorporated spiritual faith and ethical practice in ways that attended to clients', counsellor's and supervisor's authority. This chapter illustrated the value of recursive reflexivity by examining supervision discourse and reaching for ethical, relational responsiveness in supervision.

The following chapter examines the interface between the personal and the

professional in supervision with a counselling student. It addresses effects of discourses of personal failure and professional self-measurement and explores how re-storying richer accounts of personal narrative contributed to stronger accounts of professional identity.

## **Chapter 8: Restorying/restoring personal identity in supervision**

What stood out for me as I watched the tape is how there are two stories—the old story of criticism and not good enough and the other story where I have quite a lot to offer. You focussed very much on that one, which was good I thought...I liked that...Instead of having that negative voice telling me I am not good enough, I tell myself I can do it: because I can...Taking ownership of myself...I think that is sort of what has happened in supervision...taking my power back. (April, see page 66)

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I illustrate moments of discursive dissonance when accounts of personal and professional identity are shaped by discourses of professional self-measurement (Speedy, 2002) and individual self-surveillance (Feltham, 2000). I draw attention to the possibilities for movement at the interface between personal and professional narratives. By troubling the binary of the personal/professional construct, I demonstrate ways that re-storying personal identity in supervision contributed to richer accounts of professional identity for April. This chapter follows the structure of the other results chapters. I first present data-texts of supervision practice-in-action, accompanied by my reflexive commentary. I then provide data-texts from subsequent research meetings, showing April's reflections on supervision followed by a further reflexive analysis. I conclude this chapter, with a discussion on the complexity of speaking difference in supervision when personal identity and professional identity are shaped by humanistic, essentialist discourses of identity.

### **Supervision 1: From slowing down to re-focussing**

At the start of my research project, April and I had met only a few times prior to our first recorded supervision. On those occasions, April had shared that since the dissolution of her marriage she had been attending personal therapy for a number of years. In her words, April had struggled to overcome a sense of failure and the effects of emotional, social, and financial upset in her life. Changing relationship status from married to single person had had a “huge impact” on her life and her



identity. As part of our supervision contract, April wanted to use supervision to help her gain more confidence so that she could “feel better about herself” and her status as a counselling student and a single parent.

At the start of this first recorded supervision, April had reported that she did not “feel good” about her counselling work; that she needed to “slow down” this year. I heard a sense of professional failure in her speaking. Externalising language, as shown in the three previous results stories, offers a relational space for people to renegotiate their relationship to ideas: ideas that are constitutive of their identity (White, 2007). Using externalising language, I hoped to create a space for April to reposition herself in relation to the sense of failure I heard in her words.

**Ireni:** Can you say a bit more about this idea of “slowing down” April, what does that mean?

**April:** Well, I don’t think I am up to seeing clients at the moment. I did some work with a client, Martha, last week and I was absolutely appalled by my counselling. It was good last year but our first session this year was terrible. I just think I am not up to working with clients...

**Ireni...**and what will that mean for your studies this year, April?

**April:** Well, I will focus on my coursework only and leave my client work. I won’t meet this year’s course requirements so it will add another year onto my studies...I don’t want to have to do this but I am just not good enough to be working with clients at this time.

Narrative inquiry is partly about generating new stories from a posture of not-knowing, and partly about navigation (Speedy, 2008). Navigation means having a map of inquiry and holding an idea as to where a question might lead without necessarily knowing the outcomes. In hearing the outcomes of my inquiry, I experienced a sense of disquiet. Present to me were White’s (2002) words that measured against dominant values of success, “never before has a sense of being a failure to be an adequate person been so freely available to people, and never before has it been so willingly and routinely dispensed” (p.33).

In narrative practice, it is in contradiction or resistance that conditions for possibilities exist (Winslade, 2003). Listening at the level of the word for possible

pivotal moments (Weingarten, 1998), I had heard a contradiction in April's account, obscured in the dominant story of "not good enough". I had noticed two different threads running through April's account—her work with Martha was "good last year" but this particular session was "terrible". From the shadows of personal failure, White (2002) asserted that other knowledges and practices can be richly storied. My next inquiry was intended to invite April to come out from the shadows of failure and take up a position of investigation, not self-criticism.

**Ireni:** And what made the counselling with Martha so different this time from last time, do you think?

**April:** Oh...my own personal stuff kept getting triggered by the client...you know...transference going on... [Pause]

**Ireni:** Can you say some more about that, April. What do you mean by transference?

Like Claire in Chapter 5, concepts of transference and countertransference had shaped April's account of her counselling practice and her identity. As discussed in Chapter 2, transferential discourses are powerfully influential ideas dominant in Person-centred counselling and supervision. While dominant discourses exert power, power is not incontestable. Power is never complete or absolute because discourse—words and meanings—is fluid and can be reworked to resist domination (Wetherall, 2001). We exercise power through "recognising, subverting, and changing" those discourses which constitute us in oppressive ways (Davies & Harré, 1990, p.51). By asking April what she meant by transference, I was suspending an assumed agreement that transference was a commonly accepted reality between us and I was inferring that more local, contextualised meanings were available.

**April:** My client, Martha, she's a single parent too...struggling with financial and social worries...just like I am...and when she was talking, I was thinking, "*How can I help my client when I am struggling with the same issues in my life?*" I just don't think I am ready to be doing this work...I need to do more work on myself and my own issues...

April had interpreted her experience of similarity in her client's story as

transference. Strong identification with her client had invited her to doubt her ability to “be doing this work”. I am not suggesting that as counsellors we are not affected by clients’ stories, and may at times need to re-evaluate our “fitness to practice” (NZAC, 2000). As counsellors, however, we are not positioned outside the socio-political discourses that affect clients. Winslade (2002) noted that the notion that “therapists are people who have got their own act together, [and] gone through enough therapy to be sorted in order to help others” (p.37), is a popular one in counsellor education. The idea that April had to “do more work on herself” produced more discomfort for me. I wanted to create a space where April might reconsider her relationship with that idea for, in this moment, I considered that she was being subjected, and subjecting herself, to discourses of “professional self-measurement” (Speedy, 2000, p.425). In my response, I drew from narrative practices of internalised-other conversations (Epston, 1993) and self-witnessing practices (Weingarten, 2000).

**Ireni:** If the client was here in the room with us, April, what might she say about that session? Would she say it was “appalling”?

**April:** Oh no, not at all, she would think the work was very good!

**Ireni:** Oh? Why would she say that?

**April:** Well...she would have felt heard...and understood...because I could empathise with her...I knew where she was coming from...she went away feeling quite different...

**Ireni:** Would she? Wow...so why do you think there are these two very different evaluations of the same counselling session?

Narrative inquiry creates significance out of a piece of information where it did not previously exist (Winslade & Monk, 2000). Absent from April’s first account of her practice was her client’s experience, now available through an internalised-other inquiry. By listening closely and creating significance of the internalised-other response, I had offered April an opportunity to re-engage with this particular counselling event on different terms. Bringing the client’s unstoried experience into our conversation had disturbed April’s original account of her practice. By “disturbing the disturbing” (Pillow, 2003, p.18) I had invited April into a reflexive space where new accounts of practice and identity might become storied. Through

this shift in positioning, April was now in relation to another account of her practice. My refusal to accept the position first offered in transferential discourses had cleared a way for April to consider other discursive possibilities.

Reflecting on this exchange later, I realised that I could have asked more internalised-other questions to thicken the unstoried experience of the client. For example: how did Martha feel heard; what did you do to make that happen; how did you contribute to Martha going away feeling “quite different”; what was it you were connecting with in her story; what might this tell you about your capacity to hear an other’s experience, and so forth. Without building adequate scaffolding for the emerging new storyline of professional competence to take shape, the familiar deficit story of “not good enough” had not been destabilised enough. In response to my evaluative inquiry, April replied:

**April:** Oh, it’s really my Critical Self...the Critical Parent in me...constantly putting myself down...I know where it is coming from...It’s from my childhood...and that’s something for me to work on...and I have been doing that in my personal therapy for a number of years...

The therapeutic focus April was learning as a student and perhaps experiencing in her personal therapy was one that unearthed past experiences, particularly past family of origin dramas. There is a common assumption that by exploring past traumatic experiences, therapists will uncover or identify the source of a client’s presenting problem. In or exchange, a discursive tension had emerged between a constructionist understanding of identity as a relational, social achievement (Gergen, 1994) and the psychodynamic and psychotherapeutic idea of an essentialist self that is discoverable. As part of April’s internalised self was a Critical Parent, “constantly putting [her] down”. This was not a discourse I was interested in following.

At this point in the conversation it could be mooted that April and I had reached an intersection between supervision and personal therapy. Not all supervisors agree as to the degree or the legitimacy of problematic personal narratives being discussed in supervision as evidenced in Carroll’s (1996) study. As illustrated in

Chapter 5 with Claire and Chapter 7 with Louise, personal and spiritual values played a large part in constituting their professional identities. As I illustrated in Chapter 5, it was Claire's capacity to be affected, to feel anger at the injustice she was witnessing in her client's story that enabled her to take up a position of solidarity. I viewed April's words "it's my own stuff getting in the way" through a similar constructionist lens. I argue that the professional *is* personal and therapy *is* political. Later in the chapter, I explore in more detail the position of the personal in supervision. In this moment, I decided to open up a conversational space for April to talk about her personal experiences if she wished.

**Ireni:** Would you like to say some more about that now, April?

**April:** Well...if that's okay, I mean for supervision...

Perhaps unsure about the boundaries between personal therapy and supervision, April took up this offer nevertheless and spoke of the hard work ethic in her family; how she had to work hard as a child; and how she had constantly sought approval from her parents. April explained that after many years of not getting approval from her parents, she was still working hard to prove herself worthy. She described herself as "a bit of a perfectionist" and that she had what is called in TA terms, a "Critical Parent" (Harris, 1974). I did not want to criticise the transactional counselling model April was learning in her counsellor education programme and perhaps experiencing in her personal therapy. However, in hearing that April's solution was to "do more work" on herself, I did want to question the effects of what Nikolas Rose (1998) has termed "the psychologies of the self" (p.17). Later in this chapter, I offer a more detailed discussion of Rose's ideas in relation to discourses of professional self-measurement. Leaving the expression of "Critical Parent" aside, I invited April to step away from the personal story she had shared and to reposition herself as a counsellor.

**Ireni:** April, if I were a client coming to you as a counsellor with your story that you have just shared with me, what would you say to me?

**April:** I would acknowledge it must have been really hard for you growing up, not feeling accepted as a person unless you worked hard...I would have compassion for her...

**Ireni:** And if you were that client, what would you say to yourself?

**April:** Oh, that question brings up a lot of emotion for me...

Missing from this textual representation of our conversation is the delicacy, gentleness and compassion present between us. As I witnessed April's tears of sadness, I joined her with my tears and sadness that a story of non-acceptance had remained so powerfully shaping of April's identity after so many years. I had many choices in which to take the conversation. I heard April's words "acknowledgement" and "compassion" as possible entry points into new storylines and gently continued my inquiry.

**Ireni:** If you were to acknowledge yourself more, April, what things might you say to yourself?

**April:** I find it very hard to acknowledge myself... [Long Pause]

**Ireni:** If some of the compassion you feel for clients was available for yourself, what difference might that make for how you see yourself, April?

**April:** Oh, it would make a huge difference...I wouldn't be so hard on myself: I would be more compassionate for myself... [Conversation continues]

.....

**Ireni:** And what difference might these changes make for what you want for yourself this year, April?

**April:** Well...[Pause] I want to get through this year...I want to be fully present for my clients...I don't want to do a job "half-done"...and I want to be a good mother...I don't want my children to suffer because I am studying...

Emerging from the shadows of personal failure, a developing story of acknowledgement and compassion was taking shape. By rescuing April's words, "acknowledgment" and "compassion" and by unpacking their particular, localised meanings, I had invited April into a different storyline of personal and professional identity. In this new conversational space, April spoke of her personal and professional intentions for the year ahead. Appreciative self-witnessing practices (Weingarten, 2003) had become available for April as I had compassionately witnessed and acknowledge her struggle as a student and as a mother. Explicit personal and professional identity claims—being "fully present"

for her clients, not doing “a job half-done”, and being a “good mother”—now existed alongside accounts of “transference” “slowing down” and “Critical Parent”. New discursive options had become available to our conversation that might assist April to broaden her existing discursive repertoire.

As our dialogue continued, I asked April to speak more of her intentions: what did she mean by “being fully present”; why did she want to be “fully present” for her clients; and what might this say about her commitment to her studies and to her developing counsellor identity. In measured steps, the frail threads of acknowledgment and compassion that I had pulled down into our conversation became stronger and thicker. These new identity claims had been researched in supervision out of local knowledge, in contrast to the self-in-error stories that had come from disciplinary knowledge. A discussion of local knowledge and disciplinary knowledge follows in the discussion section at the end of the chapter.

At the closing of this supervision, April had decided to revisit her decision to discontinue with her client practice and we agreed to review this decision in our next supervision session in a fortnight’s time. April’s parting words were:

I know I have skills and qualities which I can bring to counselling...so, I don’t think it is about slowing down...it’s more about re-focussing on what I want to do...this [supervision] has been so clearing for me. I feel there are rays of light appearing in my mind...

I was immediately drawn to the metaphor April had used to describe her experience of our conversation. I wanted to inquire further: What are the “rays of light” that had been so clearing for you? What do the “rays of light” make possible for you to see? Poetic forms of expression can interrupt and disrupt the taken-for-granted (Pentecost, 2006; Speedy, 2005a). I wondered how the “rays of light” might interrupt the metaphor of Critical Parent and what effects our conversation might have for April over the coming weeks. I now turn to the research meeting following one month after this recorded supervision session and two weeks after a regular supervision session.

## Research Meeting 1: Reflections on supervision

By this stage in the research process, I had identified that in the reflective/research meetings, I had often defaulted into a familiar supervisor position rather than keep a researcher focus. After reviewing and analysing the first three research texts of conversations with Claire, Kay, and Louise, I had come to this meeting more prepared to take up a researcher position. I started in my usual way by asking April what was of interest to her as she watched the DVD of our supervision.

**April:** Well I have watched the DVD twice and just from observing myself, I thought it was amazing really! [Very excited]...Just watching myself, the whole process and what has happened in my life and how it all fits in! I would actually love to have a copy of the tape and view it frequently to put everything back into perspective. The second time I watched it, I focussed a bit more on your responses, how you were responding to me and about myself, how I responded to you...

**Ireni:** So, there are two responses here. The first is what you noticed about yourself and the second is what you noticed about how I was responding to you. Can you give some specific feedback...places in the tape that you can refer to, or examples of what you noticed?

**April:** I noticed so many parts in the tape where I went Wow! The first thing I noticed was why I was so sure that my practice was “appalling”...and I could see your surprise...I mean, I made a huge big mountain out of a smaller mountain really...it wasn’t a molehill...overall the whole conversation was very clarifying for me.

**Ireni:** Yes, I noticed at the end of supervision you used the word “clearing”, you said, “*this is very clearing for me*” and I wondered what you mean by that.

**April:** Supervision was very clarifying for me, because I realised everything will just happen if I just take it one-step at a time instead of doing everything at once. I now feel much more relaxed, and what I noticed is how you pick up on all my little negative threads and how you turn them around...that’s the Narrative Therapy I suppose...and I found it very interesting how it comes in. How you put a positive spin on my abilities, like you picked up on my “slowing down”, because it is very



negative sort of wording. And, I noticed how I put it into positive wording for myself. That was a very good one for me.

One of the difficulties I experienced in my study was asking questions in the reflective/research meetings that did not invite praise or applause. Asking participants about their experiences of supervision without inviting praise required skilful practice that was not always available to me. In the above text, April centred me as supervisor: “*you* pick up my negative threads...*you* turn them around...*you* put a positive spin on my abilities”. Then she moved into a more centred position in acknowledging her own contribution, “*I* noticed how *I* put it into positive wording for *myself*”. April’s discursive moves illustrate the changing subject positions available in a single conversation.

I also experienced a sense of unease that April was making sense of Narrative Therapy as putting “a positive spin on my abilities” and I wondered if this was a moment where I might speak to this misunderstanding. I did not want my silence to confirm her supposition that narrative practice was about reframing, or turning negatives into positives, or a “re-writing, or re-visioning of history” ( see White, 2000, p.57). What I had been reaching for in supervision was the idea of a multi-storied description rather than a single-storied description. I also heard traces of a self-blame discourse in April’s words, “if I just take one-step at a time”, and “all my little negative threads”. It is a matter of discursive wisdom when to trouble oppressive dominant discourses and when to remain silent (Paré, 2002).

**Ireni:** Okay, so the conversation we had in supervision invited you to look at your situation differently. Can you be more specific, April...how was supervision clarifying for you?

**April:** Well, it was not only that supervision but it was also the one after [our regular fortnightly supervision]...In the taped session, I said I was worried about not having clients and not feeling that I can integrate what I am doing. After that supervision, I didn’t really worry too much, I just left it all, so for me that session was very calming and it took some burden off my shoulders. I had been worrying about my studies and I don’t know, some process has happened inside and I feel that I am much clearer. But it happened in the other supervision too, and in the last two weeks I have

been feeling better...I went away from both supervision sessions buzzing! Quite a huge shift has happened actually...I know that I can do this work...I can see clients as well as do my course work. I feel much more on top of it, and supervision has been really good, very helpful.

I was heartened to hear that supervision had produced “a huge shift” for April yet I again experienced a conflicting ethical dilemma at this particular discursive intersection: should I invite further descriptions of April’s professional identity or should I focus on my research inquiry. In my reflective comment/inquiry I hoped to combine both.

**Ireni:** That’s great to hear April. Was there anything in particular in our conversation that led to your knowing that you can do this work, that you can see clients and complete your coursework this year?

**April:** I think it was when you said, **“If the client was in the room, what would she say?”** That was amazing! That really gave me a totally different spin on it...and I thought, would she say the same thing as me. Would she say it was appalling? No, she wouldn’t! I know I have something to offer, and it might not be perfect, but it’s good enough.

April had viewed her practice and her identity through the eyes of her client, and had decided that she did have something to offer. Discourses of professional objectivity, self-surveillance, and professional self-measurement were no longer totally shaping of April’s personal and professional identity. I understood this event had occurred because April experienced more room in supervision to speak herself differently. As discussed in Chapter 3, relations of power determine who may speak, and when, what might be spoken about, and on what terms. Words do not only represent our realities: words produce realities. In supervision, I had abandoned discourses of Critical Parent and transference that I considered had worked to produce April as a particular type of person and counsellor. By refusing to engage with these discourses, I had resisted and subverted the power of those words and opened up other more agentic positions for April to negotiate her personal and professional identity. In this way, supervision, on the terms of a narrative, constructionist understanding is considered a renegotiation of professional identity and a political conversation. I now move to our second

recorded supervision.

## **Supervision 2: The professional is personal**

By this second recorded supervision, April and I had met for two regular supervision sessions where we discussed counselling practice events. In this second recorded supervision, I again present selected texts highlighting aspects of restorying personal identity to show the relation to building professional identity. In this extract, April had presented an event that had left her emotionally disturbed. April had reported that in a peer-assessment process in her counselling course, a member of her group had written a comment to April that she “did not feel that April belonged to the group”. Although April agreed with the group member’s observation, she had experienced emotional distress at the time and continued to feel upset.

**April:** The interesting part is that I know I have distanced myself from the group...they are all working and here I am on a benefit. I know where it [the distancing] is coming from... I am uncomfortable not working...not earning my own money...not pulling my weight as such...

**Ireni:** So, can you tell me about those ideas you have that you are not pulling your own weight?

**April:** Oh...that’s old upbringing...“*you are only worth something if you work hard and pull your own weight*”...

**Ireni:** What do you think of that idea...it is a reasonable idea?

**April:** No, it stinks! [Very definitely stated... Shared laughter]

**Ireni:** Why does that idea “stink”?

**April:** Because it’s not fair, especially for children... [Pause]

My inquiry intentionally positioned April in relation to a particular set of ideas: ideas that had constituted her as a particular kind of counselling student. These ideas shaping April’s professional identity were also supported from a “corridor of voices” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.293): not only voices from her family of origin upbringing but from Western cultural stories of individualism, meritocracy, and financial independence. From a constructionist understanding, identity is constantly forming in relation with others and in relational to the ideas that constitute us. My response had invited April to evaluate the effects of these ideas.

Using externalising language, I had offered a space for April to reconsider and re-negotiate her relationship to the idea “you are only worth something if you work hard and pull your own weight”. As in our previous recorded supervision, I was attentive to both April’s story of struggle and to any subtle nuances of resistance, contradiction and discontinuity (Davies & Harré, 1990).

**Ireni:** Given the power of that idea when you were growing up April, how did you not let it get in the way with your parenting? How are the values and attitudes you hold as a parent, different to those you experienced as a child?

**April:** Oh!...my children know they are loved, definitely, just for themselves...They have had a totally different childhood...I feel fine about my parenting...I know I am a good parent...I hug them a lot and tell them I love them...

My inquiry had moved the focus of our conversation away from cultural stories of independence, achievement and self-worth towards personal stories of parenting values, commitments and aspirations. In narrative language, we had moved from generalised disciplinary knowledge to knowledge located in personal experience. It could again be mooted that my inquiry had blurred the boundaries between personal and professional narratives. However, in creating room for April to speak to loving accounts of her parenting her own children, I was not taking up a position as her personal therapist. From a feminist perspective, I consider my personal and professional identities are interwoven (see Weingarten, 1994). Located within discourses of lived experience, my inquiry had offered April a conversational space to speak to her reality of parenting.

By turning the discursive gaze back on to the effects of the ideas that had shaped April’s identity, acts of resistance and values of fairness became available to our conversation. Opening up space for conditions of possibilities and potential had produced discursive shifts for April to story herself as a loving mother who, despite her own experiences growing up, was determined to parent her own children differently. As we continued to draw distinctions between April’s experiences of being parented and her experiences of being a parent, April storied different accounts of her identity. After April had finished describing the more

loving ways that she parented her children, I asked:

**Ireni:** What might your children say about their experiences of being parented by you? What might your daughter say in twenty years' time, reflecting back about her childhood? What would be her words to describe her upbringing?

Once again, I called on the ideas of an internalised-other conversation (Epston, 1993) and a remembering conversation (White, 2007) taking place in the subjunctive tense. I had opened up more room for other types of conversations to unfold by inviting April to re-position herself in relation to her daughter's imagined responses. Positioning theory offers a way of analysing how persons in conversation are building their worlds by deploying the meanings available to them (Winslade, 2005). At this discursive moment, April was building her world on the meanings we were co-constructing together through my inquiry. Supervision was a site where April might broaden her discursive repertoire and the discursive options available for her to story herself in more preferred ways. Storying stronger accounts of our personal identity, serves to story stronger accounts of our professional identity. With our conversation now on stronger, surer ground, I shifted the focus on to April's professional identity.

**Ireni:** April, what motivated you to train as a counsellor?

**April:** I think I have a lot to offer...I have empathy and self-awareness...I am quite intuitive...and caring...and I have a desire to help others.

In storying her professional identity, April was drawing on ideas and attributes of Client-centred practice. This was a starting place from which we might construct other accounts of professional identity; accounts which call us to attend to relations of power and how the language we use in our practice constructs realities, not only for us as practitioners but also for the people who seek our assistance. I leave this supervision conversation at this point and turn to the subsequent research meeting, one month later.

## **Research Meeting 2: Reflections on supervision**

In this research meeting, April started the conversation by reflecting on how our

talk in supervision had made a difference to her relationship with her children.

**April:** It's just easier at home with the children...and that's what I wanted to achieve. I wanted to spend time with them and really be there in the moment...being kind and loving and being a good mum...actually a friend told me that I was doing a good job...I wouldn't have been able to hear that a while ago...

**Ireni:** So, how do you think you became ready to hear it now, April? What made it possible for you to hear this acknowledgement from your friend? Was there anything we talked about in supervision that helped you, or was there something else?

**April:** Good question...yes, I think something must have clicked inside. I've been trying to figure that out. Maybe I was more open and also more trusting...trusting people more...somehow I feel there is definitely a shift happening in general...

I was encouraged to hear that our exchanges in supervision may have assisted April to "hear" her friend's acknowledgement that she was "doing a good job" as a parent. Yet, once again I experienced the familiar-by-now sense that holding a dual positioning as supervisor and researcher was more complex than I had anticipated at the start of my project. In narrative research, centring the experiences of the research participants is ethical practice and I wanted to know more about the effects of supervision for April. But, I also wanted to explore with April *how* supervision how produced these possibilities. Taking up a research position, I asked:

**Ireni:** Were there any parts of the supervision conversation that were particularly meaningful for you?

**April:** I really liked your questions, "**what would your children say about their experiences of parenting? What would your daughter say in twenty years' time reflecting back about her childhood? What would her words be to describe her upbringing? Would they be the same as yours about your childhood?**" That was really a good one because it made it very clear that there is huge shift happening already from my upbringing and then looking at my daughter...her childhood is

just so different, both my children have had a very different upbringing from me...and I have actually had a lot of positive comments on how I bring up my kids and so, when I think about it, there is a lot of acknowledgement. Supervision has helped to make acknowledgement easier to talk about because I feel there is acceptance for me. It is a big part actually, to be accepted for who I am because that has not ever happened in my upbringing...

Supervision had created room for April to talk about acknowledgment, acceptance and parenting and on different terms from those previously available to her. My next inquiry invited April to continue to negotiate her professional identity on these new terms.

**Ireni:** So this story of acknowledgement, April, what difference do you think it might make to your counselling practice this year.

**April:** Well...I feel more connected to my ability as a counsellor, my self-awareness, and my openness...I feel more confident... I think it has to do with our contract that we set up at the beginning of supervision about confidence...feeling better about myself...feeling more confident, I will be more in tune with myself. I will not be so tense. I will be more relaxed; and the more relaxed I am, the more I am in tune with my intuition; and the more I can pick up different things from my client.

In my inquiry, I had taken a subjunctive stance. Asking April “what difference...it *might* make...” invited her to speak from a position of uncertainty and possibility. Within a discourse of parenting, April had storied herself more agentively. From a position of authorship, April storied a more imaginative and confident professional identity. Albeit this was a research meeting and not supervision, April had inserted herself as a storying counsellor in our conversation, taking responsible for shaping herself as the kind of counsellor she desired to be. Later in this research meeting, returning to a researcher position, I asked April what she noticed most about our supervision that stood out for her. She replied:

**April:** What I get out of supervision it that instead of spending too much time in my past in my old beliefs, you challenge me in a subtle way and

put it really back to the facts, to what is really happening. But you do it in such a way that I come to the conclusions on my own without sort of...you know, it is really subtle and I think that is very helpful...not really telling me but putting out ideas...asking questions...

**Ireni:** Is that something you might take into your work with clients?

**April:** Well, since I have been coming to you for supervision, my practice has changed. I used to say to clients “You are feeling this” whereas now, I would rather say, “How are you feeling about that?” I have moved away from just reflecting back to a client what they are saying and I’ve started asking more questions. In the first two years of my training we were taught not to ask questions, so this is quite different. From personal experience in supervision, I have come to like this approach...If I constantly tap into that vulnerable raw part of me...it’s like getting stuck in a hole. Am I ever going to come out of that?

In supervision, April had noticed my use of narrative inquiry and the particular focus I was interested in. April’s words echoed my own questioning of counselling practices that “constantly tap into that vulnerable raw part” of persons’ lives. I decided not to enter a discussion of comparison of therapeutic approaches for I did not want to criticise the counselling approaches April was learning. My preference was to focus on what was of value to her, what gave purpose and meaning to her life, and what was important for her as she developed her counselling practice. April’s words in the above text illustrate the discursive tension at intersections of person-centred approaches and native approaches to counselling. In Chapter 9, I discuss the complexities of transparency in supervision when theoretical orientations are non-aligned.

For matters of brevity, I do not present extracts from our third recorded supervision but turn now to the third reflective/research meeting. In the third recorded supervision, alongside the practice events that April had brought for review, we continued to weave together stories of parenting, acknowledgement, appreciation, and counselling practice. While the tellings and retellings in supervision drew on and reproduced particular accounts of identity, I worked to also generate possibilities for new tellings.



### **Research Meeting 3: Reflections on supervision**

In this third reflective/research meeting, I asked April for her reflections on the overall effects for her of participating in the research project.

**April:** What stood out for me is how there are two stories—the old story of criticism and not good enough and the other story where I have quite a lot to offer. You focussed very much on that one, which was good I thought...I liked that...Instead of having that negative voice telling me I am not good enough, I tell myself I can do it: because I can...Taking ownership of myself...I think that is sort of what has happened in supervision...taking my power back.

I understood April's words, "taking my power back" as an embodied emotional response to taking up a more authoritative position in alternative discourses of identity. As discussed in Chapter 3, from a poststructuralist understanding, power is not considered a commodity that can be given away or taken back: power is exercised in relation to others in particular discourses. As a witness to herself and as a co-inquirer in research, April had taken up more authoritative positions: she had been "intricately involved in the construction and reconstruction of identity and relationship" (Winslade, 2002, p.33).

**April:** When I watched the tape, I am much more aware of myself...Actually watching the tape is useful for me because it gives me an opportunity to see myself in a new way...even just the way I come across has been very helpful to me. I come across ... ..I realise that is quite a strong woman sitting there...I think she makes sense...she seems to have quite a bit of insight into herself.

As a witness to self, April had observed a storying counsellor, a counsellor developing her skill and performing a more preferred professional identity. Through her words, "I come across as more powerful", "there is potency in how I speak" April was authenticating herself through her speaking actions, not through her "being". Equally, as an appreciative self- witness, April spoke of her power, potency and insight—professional identity claims that were absent from her speaking at the start of supervision. Narrative ideas and practices had resonated

with April without my imposing or teaching Narrative Therapy.

**Ireni:** That sounds like you are having a more appreciative relationship with yourself, April! [Shared laughter]

**April:** Well, it has taken a while...that was the first time I have said something that was very positive about myself, what I said in supervision. It has taken me a long time to get to that point...but it is happening...

In supervision, I had listened for and made significance of storylines of acknowledgement, appreciation and compassion and had worked to generate alternative positions of authorship. From a narrative perspective, connecting to what is important for us generates rich material for storying professional identity (White, 1997). Resisting invitations to engage with discourse of self-surveillance and professional self-measurement, I had assisted April to bring to the surface what was important for her to connect with and develop in her personal and professional life. This excavation was not a re-framing of negatives into positives, or re-writing April's history of neglect or disregard, but a re-engagement with those values and hopes that somehow had been lost in critical stories of self. I had worked to create conditions of possibilities for April to move from critical stories of self to more preferred stories of self. I am not claiming that supervision alone was responsible for this change. April's readiness to embrace alternative stories of self might also have been supported from her personal therapy that had continued in conjunction with supervision. However, in re-storying and re-memembering her values, commitments and personal knowledges in supervision and research conversations, April had re-storied herself from positions of agency and authorship.

## **Discussion of this chapter**

### **Weaving the personal and the professional in supervision**

In this chapter, I have intentionally selected extracts from data-texts that illustrate moments of dissonance at the interface between the personal and the professional in supervision. On narrative terms, identity is considered a relational, social, and cultural phenomenon that is created and recreated through the exchanges that transpire between people (White, 2007). My focus in supervision was to resist and

subvert discourses of self-surveillance, professional self-measurement, and normalising judgements of self that were shaping April's personal and professional narratives. As supervisor, I was interested in disrupting the discursive production of April's deficit accounts of identity, and doing so in ways that did not reproduce practices of power.

### **Identity formation as socially constructed**

In her construction of self as student, April was positioned in relation to other dialogues in other conversations, for example, ideas shaping the voices of her counsellor training colleagues, or the training provider, as well as wider social discourses about counsellor identity. I heard discourses of counsellor self-surveillance (Feltham, 2002); transferential discourses; (Symons, 2008) and discourses of personal failure (White, 2002). April was not constructing a story of self-in-error on her own: she had support from a "corridor of voices" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.293). Bakhtin (1981) theorised that language lies on the borderline between oneself and the Other and meaning arises through dialogic engagement between participants at these borderlines. How I responded to April would either support these voices, or destabilise them, either way providing a platform for April's next response. The discourses through which I made sense of April's speaking would determine the shape of our conversation.

### **Disciplinary knowledge**

On Foucauldian terms, we shape our lives on the terms of disciplinary knowledge—a form of modern power—which operates in all professional disciplines. In counselling and psychotherapy, as with other professional disciplines, there are bodies of knowledge that we learn in order to become skilled at our craft. An example of disciplinary knowledge in Person-centred counselling and psychotherapy is the concept of "transference". In supervision shaped by discourses of transference and countertransference, it may be considered problematic if counsellors are affected or "triggered", as April was, by a client's experience.

According to Carroll (1996), paying attention to the "transference" occurring in the counsellor/supervisor relationship, can illuminate how that relationship "might be unconsciously playing out or paralleling the hidden dynamics of the work with the client" (p.55). He suggested that transferential issues in the supervisory

relationship would be a key factor in the effectiveness of the counsellor's practice. It could be argued from Carroll's perspective that counsellors in supervision with narrative-informed supervisors may be disadvantaged by the absence of discussion on transferential discourse. From a narrative perspective, transferential discourses are seen as particular ideas shaping particular therapeutic practices.

As illustrated in Chapter 5, transferential discourses had shaped Claire as the kind of counsellor who was in-error for experiencing identification with her client's experiences. Similarly, ideas of transference had shaped April as a counsellor who "was not sorted enough". Narrative Therapy critiques the normalising judgement of disciplinary power and asserts the value of situating local subjective knowledge alongside disciplinary knowledge. Folk psychology, in comparison with disciplinary psychology, emphasizes local and particular knowledge (White, 2004). As I argued in Chapter 5, it was Claire's capacity to "be affected", to feel "anger" by her client's experience of injustice that enabled her to position herself alongside her client in an ethos of solidarity. As I have suggested, counselling is a political endeavour for we cannot be neutral to the effects of social and cultural discourses that affect those who seek our assistance. I put forward that both Claire and April were enacting appreciative other-witnessing and appreciative self-witnessing (Weingarten, 2000) in their emotional connection with their clients.

### **Psychologies of the self**

Psychological disciplinary knowledge, referred to by Rose (1998) as "psychologies of the self" (p.17) and "pedagogies of self-fulfilment, can prevent expressions of lived experience and enactment of engaged responsive relationships in professional life (Carlson & Erickson, 1999). Foucault (1997) described such technologies of the self as strategies of modern power that:

...permit individuals to effect...operations on their own bodies and soul, thoughts, conduct and way of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p.225)

In supervision, I tried to speak in ways that made sense for April but also in ways that interrupted the technologies of the self that appeared to be shaping her

identity in deficit ways. Professional truth claims that individuals have “personal ownership of the identity they possess” (Sampson, 1989, p.919) can invite a person to work on themselves in order to attain certain “states of being”. Destabilising ideas of self-responsibility, and psychological discourses of “Critical Parent”, I troubled the notion of a self that was fixed, bound, and immune from social relations of power. By refusing to speak from within a discourse of essentialist identity, I drew on constructionist ideas that identity is formed and reformed relationally with others in particular ways through particular discourses.

Modern psychology invites persons to measure themselves against a “common normativity” (Rose, 1998, p.3) in order to measure up to certain agreed standards. Modern psychology requires persons to “understand, experience, and evaluate themselves, their actions and their lives” (Rose, 1998, p.1). Rather than trying to “understand and work on ourselves”, narrative practice seeks to understand and work on the discourses shaping us as particular types of persons. It is the discourse which is the object under scrutiny in a narrative practice, not the subject of the person. The effects of failing to measure up to a “common normativity” are division and exclusion. Indeed, April reported that she felt excluded from “normal” society by her status as a single mother; she felt she “did not belong” in her training cohort because she was not financially independent. Her solution had been to continue to “work on herself” through more personal development in order to “transform” herself. As Rose (1998) noted “psychologies of the self” (p.17) necessitate professional assistance in the form of therapy, which then robs a person of the self-authority they are seeking. A person submits to therapy in order to learn new techniques for understanding and practising on themselves.

### **Disturbing ideas of self-measurement**

I am not making claims for total transformation in supervision. What I do claim is that small discursive shifts in identity formation do occur in dialogic exchanges in supervision. In Foucault’s (2000) words: “as soon as people begin to have trouble thinking things the way they have been thought, transformation... is possible” (p.457). Moments of contradiction and ambiguity offered possibilities for April to speak herself differently. Re-storying deficit stories of self in supervision, in moments of discursive dissonance assisted April to move towards preferred

stories of professional identity.

### **The work of this chapter**

This chapter explored the relationship between the personal and the professional in supervision and illustrated the social constructionist idea of identity as a relational and social achievement. It showed how a deconstructive inquiry contested modern psychologies of the self and assisted in reconstructing and restorying richer narratives of personal identity. Richer personal identity narratives contributed to richer development of professional identity. Through narrative practices of internalised-other questions, externalising language, appreciative self-witnessing, and re-memembering conversations, obscured storylines of acknowledgement, contribution, and achievement were rendered visible. Transformational shifts occurred in April's personal and professional identity through a re-engagement of local stories in her life, produced dialogically and relationally from contextualised knowledges. In the following final chapter, I discuss the main responses to my research questions; pull together the threads woven in the four results chapters; offer implications of my study for supervision and practitioner-research practice; and argue for the significance of critical reflexivity for supervision.

## **Chapter 9: Translating research into theory for practice**

As I approach this final chapter, I am aware that the discursive tensions which prompted this study still accompany me. As researcher, I am subject to the same professional responsibilities, relational concerns and discursive tensions that I experienced as supervisor. My desire to do justice to the complexities in my practice and this study prompts me to “stretch beyond easy and formulaic understandings” (Lather, 2006, p.53). Therefore, I refrain from offering simple answers when practice/theory positions of supervisor and practitioner are non-aligned in supervision.

From a generalised concern and discomfort about the ungendered, non-contextualised and de-politicised approaches to therapy that were being presented in supervision, I designed a research project that identified specific moments of discursive dissonance. Moving between essentialist, humanistic theories and social constructionist, narrative ideas, I attempted to go beyond a philosophy of ontology in favour of a philosophy of relational ethics. That is, in supervision, I sought to visiblise the ethical intentions and commitments, values and aspirations that shaped our professional practice rather than focus on particular counselling modalities. I attempted to find common ground and create speaking positions in narratives of difference. It troubles me that the research participants have not sighted this thesis document ahead of its submission and I wonder how they will response to the final-for-now stories I have produced. Consequently, in writing this thesis as sole author I am mindful of issues of power.

I am not claiming a substantive new theory for supervision. Like Speedy (2000), I have no wish to add “supervision designer labels” or “brand-named techniques” (p.420), to the repertoires of supervisors. What I do claim is that the significance of this study is in the narrative it tells about one supervisor’s quest to understand particular discursive disturbances in her practice, and for the use of critical reflexivity as a tool to carry out this task. From local and particular knowledge-in-context, I offer three specific concepts for supervision practice when theoretical orientations are non-aligned: supervision as critical reflexivity, supervision as a socio-political conversation, and supervision as a storying practice.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the use of critical reflexivity and the ethical complexities it raises for practitioner-research. Next, I discuss each of the concepts I am proposing from this study and show their significance for a creative, ethical and effective supervision practice. From these discussions, I consider the possible implications for counsellor education programmes, for supervisors, and for students and new practitioners. Finally, I end this chapter with a summary of the conclusions I have drawn from this inquiry. In making claims for this study, I draw from the key responses to my research questions which were:

- What opportunities and limitations do social constructionist and narrative approaches to supervision make possible for students learning humanistic-oriented approaches to counselling?
- What are the relational effects of an interdiscursive supervision practice?
- How are differences in theoretical orientation negotiated in supervision in ways that open space for collaborative, generative dialogue and reflection on practice?

Critically reflecting on my practice has enhanced my practice and my professional identity in ways that I had not imagined at the start of the project. The learnings experienced at intersections where complexities arose have taken me further into my work as a supervisor, one who is interested in the political and moral implications of therapeutic practice. I now consider the use of critical reflexivity for practitioner-inquiry and for supervision when networks of discursive practice create discursive dissonance.

### **Critical reflexivity for practitioner-research**

What makes experts expert is that they problematise their situations: they keep learning, even when it is easier to habituate and not learn. Expertise does not come naturally; it is a discipline of continually seeking improvement, which can require a great deal of effort. (Jarvis, 1999, p.55)

Learning from research and transporting that learning back into practice, requires a great deal of effort, as Peter Jarvis (1999) noted. A major effort of this practitioner-inquiry has been to problematise specific ethical dilemmas arising in



my supervision practice when theoretical orientations are non-aligned. While I agree wholeheartedly with Jarvis that expertise is gained through continual practise and hard work, I do not seek to take up an expert position in supervision. Shaped by feminist and poststructuralist politics, I am committed to lessening the effects of assumed “expert supervisor” and “inexpert practitioner”. I do not deny my expertise but I strive to hold my knowing lightly in order to subvert dominant power relations and to bring forward the expertise, knowledges, skills and values of others. Critical reflexivity has assisted me in this task.

As illustrated in the four results stories, I examined how different understandings of identity formation, counselling practice, spiritual and personal narratives were negotiated in supervision, in-the-moment, in collaborative ways that generated ethical and effective professional development. I examined how discursive dissonance created dislocation and I identified ways I sustained relational connectedness by taking up a knowing-with, dialogic position. I showed how I called on discursive positioning as a theoretical tool to examine the position calls being offered/accepted/refused in moments of talk and I drew on critical reflexivities of discomfort (Pillow, 2003) to analyse my speaking and listening practices.

### **Reflexivities of discomfort**

Critical reflexivity is central to both a feminist methodology and a feminist understanding of the effects of socio-political discourse in therapeutic practice. As Erica Burman (1992) argued, visibilising moments of movement when agency and resistance are enacted is central to a feminist politics. Viewed through a critically reflexive lens, those moments when I struggled to find ways to weave a socio-political understanding of therapy with depoliticised, humanistic understandings were brought into sharp relief. Now, having placed my supervision practice under critical investigation, I am compelled not to abandon the self-knowledge achieved by this endeavour. From this position, I now argue that it is vital to make differences in theoretical orientations transparent when working with practitioners in supervision, and particularly so when working with student counsellors. For, I now claim that in the absence of mutually agreed supervision goals and process and clearly articulated theoretical understandings, counsellors and student counsellors might be disadvantaged in

supervision.

At the start of my project, I was interested in what opportunities a narrative approach offered participants for *their* professional practice development. Through close analysis of data-texts, I came to understand how I was also caught up in processes of subjectification in our dialogic interactions. In deconstructing my speaking and listening practices, I have had to confront my previously invisible certainties and assumptions. I have had to question *my* transparency, to unravel *my* intentions, to decipher how *my* speaking serves or limits others' speaking, and to imagine how *my* practice might be transformed. I have learned that if I desire to speak difference in supervision then I must listen differently. Speaking difference in supervision requires careful and generous listening, mutual goodwill, trust and relational connection. When I listened more closely to what was important for Louise and Kay, I began to understand how supervision might be shaped to meet their preferred professional development. I came to understand that the struggle I faced when engaging in a multi-lingual and multi-theoretical supervision was more complex than I had imagined at the start of the project. However, in supervision, I remain troubled with the task of naming moments of discursive discomfort which may not have been visible to others.

The question of how to engage collaboratively in action practitioner-research continues to perplex me. While arguing against unilateral construction of meaning-making in therapeutic practice, am I not constructing unilateral meaning of my research practice? Yet, to engage in collaborative meaning-making of research data, with research participants positioned outside the discursive landscapes from which I wish to examine my practice, would not have rendered the rich descriptions I was seeking. Furthermore, to invite participants to analyse discursive disturbances that they may have been unaware of does not seem ethically appropriate. Just as I distanced Kay from her counselling knowledge in a specific moment of interaction, I did not wish to invite research participants to deconstruct discursive dissonance that may have been invisible to them.

### **Writing as inquiry**

It has been through the process of “writing-in” (Pinn, 2001, p.186) my discomfort and my struggles that I have come to a greater appreciation of the difficulties of talking about dissonance in supervision. As expressed by Adrienne Rich (2001) an American poet, dissonance occurs in places where “selves are split, silenced or submerged”. In these moments, Rich suggested, there is a need for “constant footwork of imagination, a kind of perpetual translation, and an unconscious fragmentation of identity” (p.67). Writing as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) has offered me possibilities for hearing, seeing, and speaking dissonance differently. As expressed by Helene Cixous (2001): “writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (p.390, italics in original). Critically interrogating my practice through *writing* my practice has transformed my understanding of the social and cultural structures of my practice.

### **Ethics of dual positioning in practitioner inquiry**

My struggle with the ethical complexities of dual positioning in this inquiry constrained me from speaking as transparently as I might have wished to in the research meetings. Though I might have wanted my research practice to be less hierarchical than supervision practice, I was still restrained by my ethical responsibilities as supervisor. In the research meetings, I wanted to privilege the supervision experiences of participants and to create opportunities for them to speak from agentic positions in the research conversations.

Although I supplied questions for participants to consider when reviewing the DVDs of supervision (see Appendix 5A), these questions were offered as guidelines only. I did not use them in the actual research meetings, leaving the direction of the research conversation very much open to the participants’ interests. Consequently, at times the research conversations were shaped by a supervision focus rather than a research focus. I did not have the knowledge I have now to shift the discursive register in the research meetings away from supervision interests and onto my research questions. Arguably, a semi-structured interview may have produced reflections more in line with my research questions. In future practitioner-action research, I would take more time to discuss

with practitioners how researching practice is different from engaging in practice. Furthermore, I would make more distinction between applause and acknowledgement for I found it difficult to inquiry about my supervision practice without inviting comments that centred me as supervisor.

Although my intention was to draw clear distinctions between supervision inquiry and research inquiry, I struggled at times to ask questions pertinent to my research purpose. In moments of fragmentation and intersectionality, I wondered if I may have avoided the struggle to speak difference in the research meetings just as I may have avoided speaking difference at times in supervision. On reflection, I have asked myself if I informed the participants enough about my intentions, my purposes and reasons for my research project. In posing questions, I advance the view that critical reflexivity in practitioner-inquiry is an on-going process; there are no simple answers. Feminist critical research is relationally complex. I considered it was my responsibility to discern the effects of speaking difference for each research participant at each particular moment of discursive discomfort. In grappling with concerns about ethics, reflexivity, emotions, positionality, ployvocality, and my own authority as researcher, at times I privileged an ethic of relationality over an ethic of transparency.

I now examine the concepts that supervision is critical reflexivity and a socio-political conversation.

### **Supervision as critical reflexivity**

In taking a position that critical reflexivity is vital for supervision, I speak from my own understandings gained through this project. Reaching for co-generation of new professional understandings in supervision required me to accept that supervision, like any other social practice, can only be known in a fragmented and pluralistic way, as a “partially shared social world” (Shotter, 1993, p.61). Reaching for a more shared social world in supervision, I asked myself a similar question to that raised by social constructionist supervisors Philip, Guy and Lowe (2007): “Do we need to abandon our preferred orientation when supervisees exclusively embrace a particular approach” (p.52). As illustrated in the results chapters, I did not want to abandon what was of value to me as a supervisor. I did

not want to “give away” my knowledges, but I did learn to “give way” for other knowledges to co-exist alongside mine.

Working for meaningful dialogic interaction meant I had to move closer to participants’ theoretical orientations and practice preferences. I worked to generate a partially shared professional world that was not solely my knowing or their knowing but “knowing of a third kind” (Shotter, 1994). De-centring my supervisor-self did not mean that I abandoned my narrative preferences or my professional experiences. I contend that narrative practices of inquiry allowed me to hold a critical focus, to de-centre myself without giving away that which was precious to me, and to assist in the development of richer stories of professional identity without severing relational connection. As Louise commented when I asked her what was important for a supervisory relationship:

Having a genuine interest, open to others ideas and creation but at the same time introducing new ideas and shaping the thoughts and ideas of a counsellor, which is a skill...I see our relationship changing and developing...and with the freedom between us to both share our views and our concepts and ideas in a creative way. You are leaving the door open depending on what I say and what I think...it’s a sense of freedom in the conversation... I hope to do that with my clients.

Nevertheless, theoretical non-alignment produced more dissonance for me than for the research participants. In reply to my second research question, there were few reports of relational dislocation as a result of theoretical dissonance in supervision. I account for this in several ways. First, I can see now that in my past work with student counsellors from this particular training programme, I had underestimated the importance of not ignoring difference. I took a position that if dissonance arose in supervision, I would deal with it at the time. On reflection, there had been little discussion of theoretical “fit” in previous supervision with Claire, Louise, and Kay. I had assumed that because I taught Narrative Therapy in their counsellor training programme they were familiar with my social constructionist, narrative approach. I had assumed that distinctions between a constructionist and a humanistic approach to therapy were clear for them. On

reflection, I may have worked indirectly to minimise the effects of our intersecting paradigms for the sake of relationality.

Second, participants' reflections on the effects of theoretical non-alignment in supervision were relative to their understanding of the theoretical discourses shaping the supervision talk. It could be argued for example, that April was not positioned well to discuss the opportunities and limitations a social constructionist, narrative approach to supervision offered her as she had had no prior experience of these approaches. I also suggest that the absence of critical reflexivity in their counsellor training course did not position participants well to fully engage with the kind of meta-theoretical discussion I was seeking. Counsellor education programmes that teach a monothoretical understanding of therapy, might reconsider how such a view positions counsellors to engage in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural professional world.

Third, the degree of understanding about narrative approaches was different for each participant. For example, Claire specifically requested a narrative focus in supervision and wanted to understand theoretical differences between a narrative approach to counselling and the approaches she was familiar with. April, on the other hand, was new to supervision with me and had not yet attended the Narrative Therapy course I taught in her counselling course. Her knowledge of Narrative Therapy came from her experience of it in supervision. Louise, like Claire, had attended the Narrative Therapy course I taught and I assumed she had found my narrative approach unproblematic as she had engaged me already for supervision. It was Kay who noticed the most discursive dissonance between my narrative orientation and the therapeutic practices she was learning. The discursive repertoires from which I was speaking were unfamiliar to Kay, as evidenced in her following words:

It's is language thing, isn't it? My inner landscape is heavily Rogerian and TA...and I am trying to match that with yours and you presented me with another language [narrative]. When I went through the tape I thought: *"She talks about words, language, meanings, and asks questions"* ...whereas I am more interested in feelings.

As Kay and I progressed through the study, I learned to traverse both our theoretical landscapes more consciously. By inquiring about the values, qualities and aspirations Kay held as a “becoming counsellor”, common ground was found. As Davies (1991) noted, we are never captured completely in one discourse but may occupy a number of discourses simultaneously. While Kay reported the differences between my narrative landscape and her own, she also appreciated the extension and expansion to her practice that narrative supervision offered her:

Because we were discussing counselling—not a particular practice but counselling generally—that made me feel stronger. I had to think about what I was doing, and then talk about it, and I felt more confident about myself becoming a counsellor.

Positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) has been vital to my study and to the arguments I am making in this final chapter. Power works in all relationships and contexts, including professional supervision and I consider it is my responsibility as supervisor to acknowledge and subvert the effects of dominant positioning. A poststructuralist idea that language produces reality allows me to reach for more equalitarian relationships in my professional practice. As illustrated in the practice stories in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, the particular use of language offered agentic speaking positions to participants in both supervision and research conversations. Importantly, paying attention to my linguistic practices, I created agentic speaking positions for participants in their counselling practice, in our supervision and in the research project.

In researching my practice with Kay, I employed narrative practices of inquiry without imposing Narrative Therapy. By positioning myself as listener/learner in the reflective/research meetings, I came to understand the kind of supervision Kay was looking for in her final year of training. In doing so, I invited her to take up a more agentic speaking position in relation to her preferred counselling practices and professional development. Understanding Kay’s positioning as a student with “expectations and serious constraints”, I took up a teaching position at particular moments in supervision. By shifting *my* discursive position, Kay shifted her position and moved towards a more confident and competent subject as student.

Without dismissing or eradicating the differences between our preferred theoretical orientations, supervision became a multilingual practice and a multi-positioned practice.

In giving way for others' *authority*, I sometimes lost my *authority* to speak at intersections of difference. This was noticeable in conversation with Louise, for example, when I struggled with divine authority in both supervision and research talk. Holding the balance between supervision as a critically reflexive practice, a socio-political conversation, and a storying of professional identity, I sometimes lost my way. What I found helpful at these moments of dissonance was inquiry rather than commentary. Like May (2005), I found that "not instruction but invitation, not a directive but an opening" (p.172) opened up hitherto unforeseen pathways. Deconstructive inquiry opened up opportunities for Claire, Kay, Louise and April to consider their previous assumptions, and to reposition themselves in relation to their practice. From the findings in this study, I am encouraged to continue to find ways to transport a critical reflexivity into my supervision practice: to slow down those moments of discursive dissonance; to pause and consider the hidden assumptions absent but implicit in supervision talk; and to step more courageously towards dialogues of diversity. As well as claiming that supervision is a critically reflexive conversation, I further argue that supervision is a socio-political conversation.

### **Supervision as a socio-political conversation**

Traditional therapeutic approaches commonly focus on "intrapsychic, object relations, and emotional or cognitive factors, detached from societal causes of distress" (Feltham, Hodson, McDevitt, & Jones, 2005, p.41). From a poststructuralist perspective, power is intrinsic to all relationships. Thus, I argue that supervision, as with therapy, is a socio-political conversation. To further support my argument, I call on the NZAC (2002) Code of Ethics, which claims that counselling is concerned about issues of "inequality, oppression, and injustice". Accordingly, paying attention to discourses of social justice, gender, and discrimination in the supervision conversation is to enact ethical practice. Positioning theory posits that any conversation is a site of struggle and contestation. In supervision, I argue that it is a supervisor's responsibility to



engage with this struggle and to make the gendered, social, cultural, and political discourses shaping the lives of clients and practitioners visible. I strongly question the politics of a counselling practice that does not challenge individualising and pathologising discourse. Therapy that individualises oppression and pathologies persons' experiences does not produce ethical, relational, social and political change (see for example, Jenkins, 2009; Monk & Gehart, 2003; Sinclair, 2007; Sinclair & Taylor, 2004). Struggle and contestation over meaning was evident in all the practice stories I presented but perhaps most clearly seen in Chapter 5 with Claire. By not engaging with the story of her practice on terms of transgressive self-disclosure, I assisted Claire to story an alternative account of her practice on the terms of social justice and feminist ethics of care.

Supervision and therapy are political activities and counsellors need to be willing to explore how they position themselves in relation to others' lives and in relation to professional knowledge production (White, 1997). Supervision is a site for joint knowledge production and reflexive ethical meaning-making; therefore it is imperative to ask the power/knowledge questions. For instance, in the episode with Kay and discourses of "deep work", I asked whose knowledge was being privileged in supervision—Kay as counsellor, mine as supervisor, or the client's. How/when/where was this particular knowledge of "deep work" generated; whom did it serve, and, as raised by Fine and Turner (1997, p.231) "what might it leave unsaid?" (p.231). I took a position that "deep work" knowledge obscured Kay's authority as an agent of her practice. In supervision with Claire, I took a stand against disciplinary knowledges of objectivity and neutrality that I considered did not produce agentic positions for Claire to take up authorship of her practice. Knowing *when* to engage and *how* to engage in socio-political talk was made easier by the clear supervision working agreement for supervision with Claire.

Nonetheless, socio-political talk requires careful discursive listening and skilful inquiry. By not obscuring power relations in discourse and by valuing personal experiences, I provided opportunities for April to reconnect with her commitments to and intentions for her counselling studies. Moving from an account of her practice as "appalling", April re-authored herself as a student counsellor desiring to be "fully present for her clients", and repositioned herself as

a loving mother. However, missing from my conversation with April were feminist analyses of social and political understandings. From a feminist perspective, I could have created space for April to position herself alongside her client as a woman experiencing the effects of a marriage separation, single parenting, and financial dependence. Rather than an emphasis on individual failure or inadequacy, viewing the effects of wider social discourses might have also led to a more compassionate story of self. I recognise that I had not engaged in the same socio-political, feminist discourses with April as I had with Claire.

Reflecting on this absence of a feminist analysis with April, I suggest that I had more permission to politicise counselling practice in supervision with Claire because of the longer time we had known each other in supervision and because we had a shared agreement to do so. Supervision, like any other dialogic situation, is a site of relational meaning-making. My preference with April, new to supervision with me was to work to create opportunities for April to bring forth more localised stories of experience and identity.

The complexity in acknowledging the political nature of therapeutic work *and* engaging meaningfully and collaboratively with practitioners, who may not view practice through a critical lens, remains a challenge for me. Negotiating clear working agreements for supervision to make social and political discourses visible assists in navigating the complexity of such talk when theoretical orientations are non-aligned, and requires balancing ethics of transparency with ethics of relationality. The challenge for a socio-political supervision is to listen generously for understanding and to participate wholeheartedly while holding lightly to preconceived ideas. Dialogicality, according to Bakhtin (1984) means to vigorously participate in dialogue “to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree... with his [sic] eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds” (p.293). In the practice stories presented in this thesis, I recognise at times that I was not participating with my whole self: my feminist, narrative self was sometimes absent from the texts of the conversations. Missing from my utterances at times was my passion, my commitment, my desire to speak from a socio-political perspective. I struggled to language my values and beliefs in ways that would not appear critical of the apolitical counselling theories or the persons who

practice them.

## **Supervision as storying professional identity**

This study has illustrated that using the narrative metaphor in supervision when theoretical orientations are non-aligned, assisted participants to move towards more preferred professional identity stories. Common threads running through all participants' stories were constructions of self as in-error. Supporting these constructions of self in-deficit, in narrative language what is called "negative identity conclusions" (White, 2001), were counselling theories based on structuralism, certainty, pathology, individualism and essentialism. Such modernist psychological theories suggest that it is possible to know about one's own and another's lived experience from reference points outside that lived experience. My preference for seeking located experience and developing alternative ways of knowing self and others, worked to story stronger accounts of professional identity. I now summarise examples from the results chapters.

In Chapter 8, April held a view that she had a Critical Parent, an organising principle of Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1964). Supporting this transactional metaphor of a critical self were "psychologies of the self" (Rose, 1998) which required her to interrogate herself even more in order to improve herself. Narrative practices such as compassionate witnessing, internalised-other questioning, and co-authoring accounts of self-appreciation, contributed to richer development of April's personal and professional identity. I argue that narrative approaches to supervision did offer opportunities and possibilities for April to story herself differently, without limiting her counselling preferences. In April's words, there were two stories running through our supervision: stories of criticism and stories of possibilities. By locating other lived experiences, co-existing in a multi-stored landscape, April engaged in restorying herself in more preferred ways.

In Chapter 5, Claire had asked herself "what kind of counsellor are you, Claire?" when expressing what she considered transgressive self-disclosure in her counselling practice. Ideas of countertransference, blurred boundaries, and emotional over-involvement had shaped Claire's professional identity as in-error.

A re-authoring conversation produced shifts in her discursive positioning. Drawing on narrative practices of appreciative self-witnessing, listening closely at the level of the word, privileging personal local experiences, and identifying the absent but implicit values of care and social justice, I worked to assist Claire to re-story herself as a professional counsellor more in line with her values and commitments. Claire's explicit request for a narrative focus in supervision made supervision as a storytelling practice more transparent.

Kay shifted in her position of viewing supervision as a means to "getting this technique right", towards a view that supervision was a site for talking about metatheoretical concerns. From developmental, educative discourses of supervision, with their emphasis on instruction, approval and correction, Kay moved towards ideas of spontaneity, creativity, and growing competence. Alongside dream analysis and TA approaches, Kay incorporated practices of consulting your consultants (Epston, 1992) and emphasising the "other" story.

Louise's contribution to her counselling practice was at first obscured by divine authority. Listening closely for what was of value to Louise, and using narrative ideas of appreciative self-witnessing, I enabled her to appreciate her own contribution to her practice. Supervision had helped Louise to story and "ascertain" her own contribution to her practice. From a position of certainty about her practice and her professional identity, Louise spoke of becoming more open to possibilities for her identity as an on-going project:

Two things really came through to me—impact and identity... I don't think I have discovered my identity yet but I know you have helped unravel a lot of that and really got me to look at myself and I think that has done me a world of good, not only as a counsellor but as an individual.

My challenge was to speak into these multifarious discourses of identity without imposing my Narrative Therapy preferences or criticising the counselling theories, which had shaped how they viewed themselves. By using Narrative Therapy practices of inquiry, listening for expressions where movement might occur, and taking up a relational posture of "with-ness knowing" (Shotter, 2007), I assisted participants to re-position themselves and re-story more preferred accounts of

personal and professional identity.

From my situated learning, I now offer some recommendations for counsellor training/education programmes, supervisors, students and new practitioners to consider in relation to supervision and matters of theoretical alignment.

## **Implications for practice**

### **Counsellor education programmes**

I agree with Proctor (1994) that the responsibility for preparation for supervision cannot be assigned to a supervisor alone. By paying more attention to supervision in their curricula, counsellor education programmes could assist students to take full advantage of supervision as a learning forum. Better preparation for supervision could include: discussions on the purposes and processes of supervision, how to negotiate a supervision working agreement; how to find a theoretical “fit” with a supervisor; clarify responsibilities of each party, and assessment and accreditation requirements; assisting student counsellors to articulate their hopes, fears and expectations; and how to negotiate difficulties that may arise in supervision. Knowledge *about* supervision before engaging in supervision would enable more agentic positioning for students when establishing a supervision working agreement. Additionally, counselling training programmes, supervisors and student practitioners, might consider developing specific, individual three-way contracts that are negotiated collaboratively to establish clear goals and directions for supervision in line with organisational, educational and professional requirements.

However, finding common ground and shared purpose in supervision when theoretical orientations are non-aligned is not straightforward. Complexities arise at numerous intersections, for example, between “ungendered humanism” (Weedon, 1997) and feminist poststructuralism. Further investigation of how humanist and constructionist approaches to counselling practice might be integrated in counselling education programmes would provide valuable research. A study by Cornforth (2009), attempting to scaffold a bridge between humanistic and poststructural perspectives in a counsellor education programme, indicated a new appreciation by students for difference. Abandoning normative discourses in

favour of discursive pluralism in counsellor education programmes would seem to encourage a greater acceptance of diversity and difference.

### **Supervisors**

One of my learnings from this study was that I did not spend enough time clarifying with participants the distinctions between supervision conversations and research conversations. In spite of prior connection, an absence of shared understanding about the purpose of supervision was evidenced in my work with Kay, who believed that supervision in her final year of training would focus on training, assessment and accreditation in the counselling approaches she was learning. A robust discussion prior to the commencement of supervision may have prevented the confusion and misunderstanding that I presented in Chapter 6. My learning is not to take shared understanding for granted. I now take more time to discuss new supervision working agreement at the start of every year with all practitioners and student counsellors.

Supervisors might consider how they create opportunities for counselling students and new practitioners to take up positions as active speaking partners when establishing supervision working agreements as well as in supervision conversations. In narrative language, they might consider how they create a “receiving context” (White, 1995a, p.208) where understandings, theoretical orientations and philosophical values about counselling can be discussed. Supervisors might think about their own theoretical orientations and assumptions and what is being “talked into existence” (Willig, 1999, p.114) and what is being excluded. My learning from this study has been not to ignore or avoid difference but to make discursive dissonance visible as a resource for deeper relational connection and creative practice.

When supervision involves assessment and evaluation responsibilities with students, attention to power relations is even more necessary. Foucault (1980) described teaching and assessment as “a relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching...as a mechanism that is inherent to it” (p. 8). There is a danger that practices of assessment can be obscured in supervision when attempting to work collaboratively with students. Reflections from Kay, in particular, helped me to see how I had privileged

collaboration at times and underestimated the importance of accreditation and evaluation in her final training year.

### **Video-taping as reflexive practice**

As I have shown, a significant finding of my study was the contribution video-taping supervision for review contributed to the counsellors' practice. A concept used in this study is that subjectivity is a position maintained in relation. Subject positionings are discontinuous and constructed in the moment, unlike roles that pre-existing subjects take up. As co-inquirers to my supervision practice, I had assumed the focus of the reflective/research conversations would be on my research questions, noting differences in theoretical orientations, relational effects of intersecting practice, and how these differences were negotiated. In reality, reflection conversations provided a platform for participants to review *their* speaking and listening practices, not as a counsellor under review but as a partner in the research project. As co-inquirers of my supervision practice, significant possibilities opened up for their performance of new professional identity claims.

In Narrative Therapy, the idea of “performing oneself” means to bring something about, to bring something into existence that did not exist in the same way before. With each performance of identity, we generate new meanings and engage in a re-authoring of our lives and relationships (White, 2007). In the reflective meetings, Claire, Louise, Kay, and April and I engaged with new meanings and re-authored new stories of professional identity. As we all performed ourselves differently in relation to each other's performance, we continued to re-author ourselves more agentially, for as Turner (1980) expressed it: “The performance transforms itself”(p.160). Through performing themselves in supervision and later reviewing that performance on DVD, Claire, Louise, Kay, and April enacted further stories of their professional identity. Observing the performance of self on the DVD, lead to informing and forming a richer personal and professional identity in the research meetings. Their comments included:

**Claire:** Watching the tape is useful for me; it gives me an opportunity to see myself in a new way...

I think taping supervision is a good idea because I can see myself differently... it has been wonderful, most affirming...

It's very different, being an observer...what I'd like to do is bring those two [selves] together, gelling them with what I see as an observer and what I think about myself.

**April:** When I watch the tape I am much more aware of how you turn things around and it was very positive...

Having the tape was very helpful; it gave me a good idea of how far I have come and how strong I come across. I certainly did not expect anything like this when I joined the research project...

For me the most surprising and unexpected part was watching myself on DVD and seeing a very different person to how I see myself, or rather, how I saw myself...

**Kay:** The research project has been fantastic and I have got heaps out of it, especially in my last year of training...the best year I've had!

I learned so much from watching the tapes and from our discussions. It was so enquiring and I had to think about it [your questions/my practice] and I have this new picture, a new landscape.

**Louise:** The research project has had a huge effect for me because you don't really have time to analyse what you are doing even in supervision, and it gave me time to analyse what I was doing and to think about it and it made me feel a lot more beneficial to my clients and to see myself in a different light....

I would say I am quite a different person now. Quite confident, more affirmed and I feel that I am still working on my identity...

These reflections from participants lead me to argue for the value of video-taping and collaboratively reviewing supervision. Consequently, I now incorporate video-taping supervision for purposes of review in my supervision agreement (see Appendix 7). I explain to practitioners that video-taping supervision is part of my supervision practice; that reviewing supervision supports collaborative co-construction of our supervision; and that reviewing their performance in supervision is a further enactment of professional identity.



## **Students and new practitioners**

I had always provided written information about supervision and negotiated a written working agreement with practitioners engaging me for supervision. As a result of the findings in this study, I now provide more detailed written information about my theoretical positioning and spend more time discussing in what ways my assumptions will suit, or not suit, their supervision requirements. When supervising student counsellors, it is even more important that I name my theoretical assumptions. It could be argued that student counsellors have a right to expect supervisors, approved by their training programmes, to share the same theoretical orientations as those they are learning. If this is not so, then it is a supervisor's responsibility to identify possible areas of dissonance.

I now take more time to discuss my theoretical assumptions, my practice preferences and my understandings about supervision. I acknowledge that sometimes our ideas may not always harmonise and I alert practitioners to this possibility in advance. I include information about my understanding of the purposes and processes of supervision, my theoretical preferences, and the values and commitments that support me in my practice. I have provided this information in Appendix 7.

After a full discussion on how we might work together and what supervision might look like, a student or new practitioner and I sign a supervision working agreement. An example of a supervision working agreement is provided in Appendix 8. This agreement includes agreed processes, purposes and responsibilities of supervision as well confidentiality issues and a process for resolving any concerns about ethical practice. Most importantly, a practitioner's hopes, goals, aims, and outcomes for supervision are included in this document. Each working agreement is tailored according to the requirements of each practitioner. A formal review date is agreed although changes can be made on an on-going basis

## **Looking forwards**

Although pertaining to counselling supervision, the conclusions of this study are relevant for other areas of professional practice. New forms of co-

operative practice and dialogic engagement, which heighten shared understanding, are required in an increasingly multi-disciplinary, organisational work environment. For example, Hulme et al., (2009) found that their interdisciplinary practitioner-study, drawing on co-inquiry processes, created a less hierarchical space. Within discrete professional groups different knowledges and commonality of purpose produced common language and shared understandings. These authors' research did not have the complexity of power relations present in therapeutic relationships. Nevertheless, there is scope for further research to investigate how research space and a reflexive stance could be transported into multidisciplinary practice.

In the context of counsellor education, there is scope for introducing social constructionist, narrative approaches into counselling programmes alongside integrative approaches. Increasing discursive options and encouraging "paradigm proliferations"(Lather, 2006) for undergraduate and postgraduate students in a spirit of collaboration is a challenge I would like to take up in the future. In the context of supervision, there is scope for further research of cross-disciplinary and interdiscursive supervision.

The challenge for all professional communities, I suggest, is to create conditions for generative and relational "dialogicality" (Bakhtin, 1981). Difference needs to be identified, understood, and publically articulated in ways that make it possible for us, as counsellors, clients and citizens to go on together in sustained relational responsiveness. A genuine dialogue requires that persons do not assimilate or colonise each other but engage in a kind of a discursive dance, to and fro, positioning and re-positioning themselves in conversation. Supervisors carry more responsibility for creating conditions for generative and relational "dialogicality" and discursive movement. The practice stories offered in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, demonstrated ways to engage dialogically in narratives of difference, and to ask questions, respond, listen and agree or disagree in ways that moved the conversation forward and enhanced practice development. Although, I was not always successful in this discursive dance, feedback from participants that they experienced supervision as enhancing and enriching of their professional identity, supports my commitment to continue to trouble the edges of my knowing as a

supervisor, counsellor educator and researcher.

## **My learnings**

I began this thesis with a translation metaphor describing my interdiscursive supervision practice as a kind of metaphorical translation of one language/culture to another. Generating theory from research has also been likened to a kind of translation, bridging research outcomes and practice implications (Steier, 1991). I have sought to translate my research findings in ways that speak to my research participants, and to my professional and academic communities. However, in seeking to provide a bridge between different therapeutic language communities and between practice and research communities, I have found that much more than translation is needed. What has served me more than linguistic techniques has been an ethic of hospitality and a commitment for collaborative relationality. I have shown that practices of critical reflexivity, awareness of the usefulness of positioning theory, and maps of narrative inquiry work to create moments of shared meaning and relational connection in supervision when theoretical orientations are non-aligned.

In this study, I privileged my relationship with participants over my insistence for particular techniques or practices. How supervisors/educators/researchers position themselves in relation to their own knowing and in relation to others' knowing is of great interest to me. This thesis has demonstrated the layered complexity of such a task. The challenge this thesis has addressed is how supervision, as critical reflexive meaning-making, might engage with dialogues of diversity in ways that promote authorship and agency for practitioners. Interweaving a critical approach to knowledge production with humanistic, depoliticised approaches to counselling is a complex and skilful endeavour.

As a result of this project, I am more conscious of turning away from, what Shotter (1993) referred to as, "the imposition of monologic theoretical systems of order" and striving for *composing* more "dialogic forms of practical-moral knowledge" (p.61). I have discovered the difficulty of holding the "weariness of uncertainty" (Paré & Lerner, 2004, p.2) while sustaining my moral commitment to dialogic mutuality. Non-aligned theoretical supervision is not easy. Without an

ethics of hospitality, generous listening, and holding lightly to my preferred counselling approaches, it may have been impossible.

This thesis, I suggest, has produced “knowledge differently and produced different knowledge” (Lather, 2006, p.52) knowledge which spans theory, practice, and self. I have produced this knowledge through the use of critical reflexivity, positioning participants as co-inquirers, and video-taping supervision as a way of reflecting on and developing richer accounts of professional practice and identity. The conclusions arrived at in this study lead me to argue that although complex and difficult, narrative constructionist approaches to supervision are generative of ethical and effective counselling practice when theoretical orientations are non-aligned in supervision. I argue that it is in moments of dissonance that discursive movement is possible. If supervision is to offer genuine dialogicality then a supervisor’s task is to remain vigilant to conditions of possibilities. Difference does not have to be tolerated, ignored, or minimised: difference can be cultivated as a spark for practice innovation and creativity.

My intentions for embarking on this project were to generate new understandings for my practice; to contribute knowledge to my professional community; and to satisfy the requirements for my doctoral study. These hopes are connected to a larger project. Denzin (2009) suggested the task for critical qualitative research in the new millennium is to create a global interpretative community, one that honours and celebrates diversity and difference. Global symposiums in family therapy (see for example, Flaskas et al., 2000) illustrate the complexity of engaging in dialogues of diversity, and the need for care and goodwill in order to communicate respectfully and meaningfully. My hopes are that this study will contribute to global dialogues about practitioner–inquiry and the value of critical reflexivity for researching practice; and will join the multilingual conversations about diversity and difference.

## Afterwords

Narrative Therapy draws from a landscape of metaphor and imagination. In this postscript, I call on images that speak to me of the tensions and joys I have experienced as practitioner-researcher. Metaphorically, the edge of any known territory is a place of risk-taking and vulnerability. Combining metaphorical and geographical images, Kevin Roberts, CEO for Saatchi and Saatchi, described Aotearoa New Zealand as a distant country at the edge of the world and as such, a country offering opportunities not possible elsewhere:

Distant becomes Edge—the hottest place in the world to be, and to be from. Edge is biological. Great change happens at the margins. Edge is our greatest advantage. Every world needs an edge. This is New Zealand's position on our planet. The edge is the most innovative and generative place in any system. The action is at the margins, where there is freedom to create away from the orthodoxy of the centre. (Roberts, 2004)

Robert's words sing to me. Troubling the edges of my knowing, I have taken risks and placed my supervision practice dilemmas into public, professional and academic domains. I have exposed the edges of my practice in the hope that conversations around difference will generate innovative practice.

Also resonating for me are the words of Kapka Kassabova (2007), a European/NZ poet who likened linguistic translation to travelling over an unpredictable landscape “being constantly on the move, skipping over invisible borders of identity and meaning” (p.58). Here at the end of the world, we learn to dance (Jones, 2002). I have learned to dance within and between discourses as I take my place with each new supervision partner, trying not to skip over invisible borders of identity and meaning. I recognise that if I am to maintain the possibility of speaking/dancing with others from different discourse communities, I must move away from the centrality and certainty of my knowing, while bringing all that knowing to the task.

That, I suggest, is the paradox of speaking difference.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Letter of information and invitation to join research

Dear

We may have been working together in supervision and have agreed to continue for 2007 or you may be looking for a supervisor for 2007. As well as being a supervisor for XXX, I am a doctoral student at the University of Waikato and I am writing to invite you to join me in researching my supervision practice. The purpose of this letter is to give you a fuller picture of my background and the research I want to do, so that you can consider my invitation. As a member of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors, I subscribe to the NZAC Code of Ethics and the ethics research regulations of the University of Waikato.

### My background

Some of you know me already through our earlier work in supervision, but I would like to make this information available to others who may consider joining my research. My past working experiences include teaching and social work. I completed a post-graduate social work and counselling degree from Flinders University in 1985, and a two year Narrative Therapy training course at the Dulwich Centre in Adelaide. Since then I have worked in mental health, family therapy, counselling and supervision. My private work includes individual and couple counselling, teaching Narrative Therapy, and supervision for community practitioners, counsellors in private practice, counselling students, and group supervision for practitioners in health and community agencies. I have been interested in counselling supervision for many years; have presented papers at national and international conferences; and facilitated workshops in New Zealand and the UK. I am also Professional Advisor for Social Work and Counselling, Child Disabilities Services, Waitemata District Health Board.

### What the project is about: Researching my supervision practice

I want to explore how different theories and counselling practices are interwoven in supervision in ways which allows space for difference, dialogue and connection. In particular, I want to find out how you experience supervision, what is helpful and not so helpful for you. The main research questions I am asking in this study are:

- What opportunities and limitations do social constructionist and narrative approaches to supervision make possible for students learning humanistic-oriented approaches to counselling?
- What are the relational effects of an interdiscursive supervision practice?
- How are differences in theoretical orientation negotiated in supervision in ways that open space for collaborative, generative dialogue and reflection on practice?

### How the research will be carried out

To answer these questions, I will video and audio record three supervision sessions and ask you to review each video tape in your own time. I will watch the

tape separately and we will meet to discuss our reflections. That conversation will also be recorded. I will write you a letter following this meeting summarising our reflections. At any time in the recorded supervision and research sessions you can ask that the tape is switched off. I would like to record three supervision conversations and three reflections on supervision conversations over the course of six months and a final meeting to reflect on your experience of the research. There will be no fee for supervision for the duration of the research as I am asking you to volunteer about 8 hours of your time outside our usual supervision time. I will go over the details again and give them to you in written form at an initial meeting in February 2007. I will also include a suggested timeframe for the research.

### **Ethical Dilemmas**

I understand there are many ethical dilemmas to consider when practitioners research their practice while engaging in practice and I have tried to anticipate any difficulties which might arise for us. One ethical dilemma is that I will be both the supervisor and the researcher in this project. To make the potential for conflict of interest and the inherent power relations in these two positions transparent, I have offered some ethical guidelines for how we might manage the supervision and research process so that you will not be disadvantaged in any way. If a conflict of interest should arise between the research process and supervision, I will prioritise supervision.

You are also able to read the ethics application I have submitted to the University of Waikato, School of Education Ethics Committee, before deciding whether to join me in this project. This application will be available at the initial meeting in February 2007 where all matters pertaining to the research will be discussed fully, including client protection, your own anonymity, right of withdrawal, ethical guidelines, and a research partnership/informed consent form. There is no obligation for you to participate in this research. I will be pleased to work with you in supervision whether you decide to join the research or not. If you are interested, or have further questions, please contact me at the above address.

Yours sincerely

Ireni Esler

You are also free to contact my academic supervisors with any questions about this research project:

Dr Kathie Crocket and Dr Elmarie Kotzé  
Department of Human Development and Counselling  
School of Education, University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105, Hamilton  
(07) 838 4500  
[kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:kcrocket@waikato.ac.nz)  
[elmariek@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:elmariek@waikato.ac.nz)

## **Appendix 2: Processes for the research project**

### **Step 1: Initial group meeting to discuss the research project:**

We will meet in February 2007 to talk more about the research process, the ethical guidelines, and the use of the research material. I will explain your right to withdraw from the research, and if you wish to join me at this meeting, you can sign the research partnership agreement/informed consent form. After this meeting, you may decide not to participate in the research and in that case, our usual supervision arrangements as per our agreed supervision contract will continue.

### **Step 2: First recorded supervision session:**

This supervision session will be video/ audio recorded, and I will transfer the video on to a DVD for us to review separately. I will provide questions as a guideline for how you might review the DVD, for example, what stood out for you, what was particularly meaningful, and so on.

**Step 3:** A fortnight later, we will have our usual supervision session, which will not be recorded.

### **Step 4: First reflective/research meeting:**

At our next meeting, in a fortnight's time, I will interview you about your reflections on the recorded supervision session. I am particularly interested in your experiences of supervision and I will also share my reflections. This reflection conversation will be video/audio recorded and transcribed for my research. Following this meeting, I will send you a narrative style letter highlighting the main points of interest. We will repeat this sequence three times over the research period from March through to September 2007. There will be a total of three tapes of a supervision session and three tapes of a research/reflection on a supervision session. All material from these tapes will be available for you to view and for me to use as part of the research inquiry. If you wish, you are free to edit and/or ask for any part you do not want included in the research to be omitted. I will take responsibility for selecting and analysing parts of supervision and research conversation as they pertain to my research questions.

### **Step 5: Group meeting to reflect on the research process**

There will be a final one-hour meeting at the end of the final recorded sessions to talk about how you experienced the overall project, how you felt the reflections on supervision assisted your practice and anything else you want to discuss. This meeting will also be recorded and available for use in the research project.

### **Privacy and protection for clients**

In the final written thesis and in any subsequent presentations or publications, I will change all details, which could identify the client. You can choose pseudonyms for yourself and any client about whom we speak, and I will take particular care to protect the client's identity. A professional typist who has signed



a confidentiality clause in her contract will transcribe the twelve research conversations and the final group meeting reflecting on the research process. My academic supervisors, Dr Kathie Crocket and Dr Elmarie Kotzé who have considerable experience in professional supervision, have permission to view the tapes and transcripts. Once my thesis has been accepted, all audio and video tapes will be disposed of carefully.

### **Time required of participants**

With the initial and final meetings, the time required reflecting on the DVDs of supervision, and then meeting to reflect on your reflections, I am asking you to give about 8 hours of your time. I will not charge fees for the eight supervision sessions during the period of research to compensate for this personal time you are giving to the research. If you start the research project and find you are unable to continue, it will not affect our regular supervision, and we will continue as per our agreed contract if you wish.

Ireni Esler  
Supervisor and Researcher

### Appendix 3: Ethical guidelines for research

These guidelines are to be read in conjunction with the New Zealand Association of Counsellors' Code of Ethics, 2002.

1. A clear supervision working agreement will be established according to the NZAC Code of Ethics, and your particular supervision requirements.
2. All video/ audio recordings and all notes and transcripts produced in supervision will be treated in the same way as other professional practice material and kept secure and private. All material generated in the course of the research will be available for my academic supervisors, Dr Kathie Crocket and Dr Elmarie Kotzé.
3. Counsellors and student counsellors in this research project will provide professional disclosure to clients of their participation in supervision and in this research, preferably through a written professional disclosure statement, such as:

*As a counselling student, I have a commitment to regular professional supervision. In 2007 I am joining my supervisor, Ireni Esler, in researching her supervision practice. Three of my supervision conversations will be taped and available for the research. My supervisor will ensure that your privacy is protected if I speak in supervision about my work with you on these occasions. It is my ideas about my counselling practice, rather than you and your life that are the focus of professional supervision. However, if you have any concerns about the research you are able to ask that my work with you is not recorded for purposes of the research.*

4. The privacy of the client will be upheld in every aspect of the research and pseudonyms will be used for counsellors and clients in the process and the publication of the research. Any information, which would reveal the identity of the client, will be changed.
5. At any stage in the recording of a supervision conversation or a research conversation, the counsellor can ask that the video is switched off and supervision will continue unrecorded.
6. The counsellor may withdraw from the research at any time up to one month after the last transcript has been made. In such an event, our regular supervision arrangements will continue if the counsellor so wishes.

Ireni Esler  
Supervisor and Researcher

## **Appendix 4: Research Partnership Agreement and Informed Consent**

By signing this agreement, you are giving your formal consent to take part in this research project, which has ethical approval from the School of Education Ethics Committee, University of Waikato.

**I....., as the research partner,**

I understand that Ireni Esler is undertaking this project as part of her doctoral degree and she is subject to the University of Waikato ethical requirements and oversight from university academic staff, Dr Kathie Crocket and Dr Elmarie Kotzé. I have read the ethical guidelines and I am aware that Ireni will be conducting this research according to the NZAC ethical code for research and the University of Waikato procedures and principles for conducting research.

I have read the written material about the purposes and procedures of this research and have enough information to make an informed decision. I agree that 3 supervision sessions, 3 research meetings and a final meeting will be video and audio recorded, and these recorded conversations will be available for Ireni's research. I will watch three DVDs of our supervision conversation in my own time. I have read and understood the timetable for the research and I will be able to commit to the proposed timeframe. I understand scheduled meetings can be re-arranged if necessary. Ireni can use the research findings in future publications and conference presentations.

**I, Ireni Esler, as primary researcher in this project, agree that:**

No video or audio tape of our supervision conversations or our research conversations will be shown to anyone except my academic supervisors, Dr Kathie Crocket and Dr Elmarie Kotzé. Transcripts will be available for you to read and edit and you can request that any part not be used in the final thesis. The selection and analysis of the research material will be my responsibility. Publications of the research findings or any subsequent use of the research material will not provide any information that would reveal your identity or the identity of clients. During any time in our supervision and research conversations, you can ask me to stop recording for whatever reason. You can withdraw from the study up to one month after I have transcribed the last tape and our usual supervision will continue if you wish. There will be no exchange of money for supervision during the research period but after the research has ended, our regular supervision agreements regarding fee for service will resume.

Research participant:  
Signature:

Primary Researcher:  
Signature:

### **Appendix 5A: Questions to assist in reviewing supervision**

1. What is of interest to you as you watch the tape of our supervision conversation?
2. Which parts of the supervision conversation are particularly meaningful for you?
3. Why do these moments stand out for you?
4. Were there any moments when you noticed our conversation wandered off track or was not of interest to you?
5. Did you notice any moments when we were talking from different perspectives or different ideas about counselling?
6. How did you make sense of these moments?
7. Were there aspects of our talk that were less helpful?
8. Which parts of supervision worked really well for you? Why was this?
9. Are there any particular parts of our conversation you would like to talk more about?
10. Are there any parts of the supervision conversation that you have taken into your work with your clients?
11. What were the effects for you and your client when you did this?
12. How do you think supervision is contributing to your professional identity? Have you noticed anything in particular in this supervision conversation that supported your counselling practice and your sense of professionalism?

### **Appendix 5B: Questions to assist discussion in final group meeting**

1. What was it like for you to take part in this research and to reflect on our supervision conversations?
2. Were there times when you felt challenged by the ideas in supervision, or by the way I expressed them?
3. What was that like for you?
4. Did you feel we discussed these moments adequately at the time?
5. How has reflecting on our supervision made a difference to your ideas about counselling?
6. How has it made a difference to the work you do with clients?
7. How has it made a difference to how you think about yourself as a counsellor?
8. Would you recommend a narrative approach to supervision to other students in your counselling training programme?
9. Is there anything else you would like to say at this time?

## Appendix 6: Example of letter sent after research meeting

This letter was sent to April after our second reflective/research meeting.

Dear April

Here is my letter, summarising the main points of our research meeting. For clarity, I have put your words in *italics* and my questions in **bold**. From our conversation, I have selected three themes which stood out for me. I hope these themes are meaningful for you too.

### Appreciative self-witnessing

April, you said that watching the DVD of our supervision session is useful for you for it gives you an opportunity to notice yourself differently. For example, you said:

*...seeing myself being very different to the way I feel. I come across as more powerful than I actually feel... there is potency in how I speak... even just the way I come across has been very helpful to me. I realised that is quite a strong woman sitting there...I think she makes sense...she seems to have quite a bit of insight into herself.*

Your reflections on the effects of watching yourself on DVD, spoke to me of the benefits of video-taping supervision. Witnessing yourself on the DVD, you noticed aspect of your identity that had been overshadowed by critical thinking. You started to appreciate yourself in new ways. Seeing and hearing yourself speak in supervision, you realised that you made sense and had quite a bit of insight into your life and your counselling practice. Your comments affirmed for me that talking about our personal identity in supervision contributes to our sense of professional identity.

### Storying identity in supervision

You also noticed two particular stories taking shape in supervision:

*What stood out for me as I watched the tape is how there are two stories—the old story of criticism and not good enough and the other story where I have quite a lot to offer...You focussed very much on that one, which was quite good I thought...I liked that...Instead of having that negative voice telling me I am not good enough, I tell myself I can do it: because I can...Taking ownership of myself...I think that is what has happened in supervision...taking my power back.*

In supervision, I am interested in counsellors' achievements and successes as well

as their struggles and difficulties. We talked a lot about how you saw yourself as a practitioner and counselling student, how there were times when you didn't feel "good enough". As we discovered other stories of your practice and parenting, a more confident story emerged: you turned the volume down of the negative voice and acknowledged that you had a lot to offer the counselling profession. You said:

*Feeling better about myself, feeling more confident, I will be more in tune with myself. I will not be so tense; I will be more relaxed; and the more relaxed I am, the more I am in tune with my intuition; and the more I can pick up different things from my client.*

April. I believe that how we talk in supervision, and what we talk about, greatly influences our view of ourselves. As counselling practitioners, we exercise power in what we notice, and in what we do not notice or ignore. In supervision, I tried to notice other experiences in your life that were important to you but had perhaps been overshadowed by dominant stories of criticism. In counselling, clients often come with problematic stories, and while we pay attention to those stories, we also listen for submerged stories that might support alternatives relationships with self and others.

#### Storying Acknowledgement:

For example, in the research meeting you said talking about acknowledgement in supervision shaped a different view of yourself. You were more familiar, perhaps, with negative stories of self. You said that the kind of talk we engaged in, in supervision, had turned that around for you:

*There is no negativeness around when I talk with you... you turn everything around into a positive and for me that is very important because I have got, well I used to have, a very negative sort of mind...and I know I have a lot of potential that's the thing, I can see that more and more and more....*

When I heard your words, April, I asked you ***"if you were to acknowledge yourself more what were other things you might say to yourself about surviving a lack of acknowledgement in your growing up?"*** This question took you by surprise and you had to really think about it! Then, when we focussed on your own experiences of being a parent, there was quite a lot that you could acknowledge about yourself! You thought it was a very good question when I asked: ***what would your children say, what would your daughter say in 20 years' times, reflecting back about her childhood. What would be her experiences, and would they be the same as yours?*** You said:

*That was really a good one because it made it very clear that there is huge shift*

*happening already from my upbringing and then looking at my daughter...It has taken a while. That is the first time I have said something that was very positive, what I said there in supervision. It has taken me a long time to get to that point because I've worked very hard to be a good parent and I've stuffed up a lot of times, but it is OK because I have done what I could at the time.*

### Storying Contribution

In this research meeting, I asked you how you had contributed to your children's lives and to the lives of friends and to your clients that you are currently working with in counselling. While you thought that was a very good question, you had difficulty answering it so we decided to look at the themes of acknowledgement and contribution in our next supervision. I offer some questions that you might like to think about before we meet again in a fortnight's time.

- How have you contributed to the lives of your children?
- How have you contributes to your family and friends?
- What difference do you make in the lives of clients you work with?
- What is your contribution to others in your counsellor training course?
- If other people, including clients, were to speak of the contribution you make to their lives, what might they say?
- In thinking about the contribution you make to other peoples' lives, how does that strengthen the acknowledgment story?
- How are you contributing to my research project?
- What difference are you making to my supervision practice?
- What might be the learning I am making from your participation?

I look forward to catching up with you in our next supervision and hearing more about how acknowledgement and contribution have shaped your thinking and your practice.

Warm regards

Ireni

## **Appendix 7: Assumptions which inform my supervision practice**

This information is designed to make my understanding of supervision transparent and available for discussion. I name the theoretical ideas and philosophical values which shape my practice for you to consider before we meet to discuss working together. This information is intended as a starting place where we can talk about how we will work together collaboratively in supervision. As an Accredited Supervisor of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors, I am committed to practising according to the ethical guidelines of the NZAC Code of Ethics, 2002. If you do not have a copy of this document, I can provide one for you. If you belong to any other professional association with a Code of Ethics, or your agency has its own Code of Practice, please bring these documents to our first meeting and we can incorporate their guidelines into our supervision working agreement.

### **The supervisory relationship**

I consider our supervisory relationship is a collaborative partnership, designed to assist you to develop your practice in line with your hopes and expectations alongside your agency/professional association's expectations. I view supervision as a dynamic, lively conversation that supports you and your work with clients. I will bring my knowledges, skills, and experience along with curiosity, openness, and respectful inquiry to assist you in this task. I operate on the assumption that you have valuable skills, knowledges and experiences to bring to supervision and together we will share our collective knowledges and experiences. I will value our supervision time as private, regular and uninterrupted space and I will centre your practice concerns as our primarily focus.

### **Responsibilities of Supervision** (see NZAC, 2002).

Supervision carries individual and shared responsibilities. According to the NZAC Code of Ethics, counsellors are responsible for selecting and bringing to supervision relevant aspects of their professional practice and their personal well-being. I consider that you know best which aspects of your work to bring for review, although I might be curious about other aspects. I expect you to come to supervision with an agenda which we can add to as other ideas or other aspects of practice come up. As supervisor, I will listen closely to your hopes and preferences for your practice and I will work to bring these hopes and intentions into the detailed talk of client review.

As supervisor, I am responsible for assisting you to explore and reflect on your professional practice; for helping you to monitor your competence, safety and fitness to practice; for disclosing any concerns about your work to you first, before taking further action; and for maintaining any overlap in our relationship outside of supervision. Together, we are responsible for distinguishing between our supervision relationship and other professional or personal relationship we might have; and for identifying when you might need to seek counselling for a personal concern that cannot be managed in supervision. We will discuss these responsibilities when we meet to establish our supervision agreement.

As supervisor, my aim is to assist you to develop your professional practice in the



direction you wish and on ethical and sound terms. My preference in doing this is through a process of inquiry where I ask questions that are intended to assist you in exploring areas of your work that are of interest to you. I am also interested in how the wider social contexts shape our understanding of people, problems and professional practice. I ask questions about how particular discourses, or particular ways of thinking and speaking, shape the lives of persons we work with, as well as shape how we think about ourselves as professional practitioners. From a Narrative Therapy perspective, I consider a person is not the problem: rather, problems are a result of many complex social and political circumstances. I prefer to use externalising, non-pathologising language when talking about clients in supervision. I ask counsellors to imagine the client of whom they are speaking, is in the room with us. Sometimes this is not always appropriate.

### **Processes of supervision**

I will try to share my knowledge, skills, and experiences in ways that do not position you as knowing less than me. In sharing my knowledge and skills in supervision, my preference in doing this is through conversation where we can both ask questions of each other. For example, you might be seeking guidance on a particular aspect of practice. My preference to giving advice would be to ask you more questions or invite you to interview me about my practice experience. Other ways of extending your practice might be:

- Indirect discussion and reflection of selected practice events that you bring to supervision
- Direct observation of practice through video/audio/ recordings or live observation
- Sharing of professional development events/workshops/journals/ books
- Sharing of knowledges and skills through interviewing techniques

I will hold lightly to my preferred practices unless I am concerned about an aspect of your practice and then I may offer tentative suggestions. If I am still concerned I will discuss my concerns with you before taking my concerns outside supervision. As per our agreement I will work collaboratively, respectfully, and transparently in taking this action.

### **Supervision working agreement**

Here are possible questions for you to consider which we will discuss in our first supervision meeting and then write into our final supervision agreement. They are offered as guidelines only.

1. What would you like to achieve in supervision?
2. What are your goals for the year?
3. What are your hopes and intentions for your practice?
4. How shall we best achieve these goals, hopes and intentions?
5. What would you like me to notice in the development of your practice?
6. What changes to your practice would you like to make this year?
7. Why is this? What would be the effect of those changes for yourself and the clients you work with?
8. What kinds of process in supervision have worked well for you in the past?

What has not worked so well?

9. How would you like to receive feedback from me?
10. Are you clear about the role of assessment and evaluation in supervision (if appropriate)
11. Are you clear about the interface between personal therapy and supervision?
12. Are you familiar with NZAC Code of Ethics? What are the ethical dilemmas you have faced in the past? How did you manage them?
13. Are there any other issues we need to discuss in this agreement?

When we are ready to finalise our supervision agreement, I will ask you to write your hopes for supervision which I will attach to our supervision agreement. We will each have a copy of this agreement and use it as a working document to keep us on track in our supervision conversations.

### **Assessment of professional practice**

For students requesting supervision with me, I ask you to think about how we might work together if formal assessment is part of my supervisor's responsibility. I will discuss the responsibilities of my dual positioning as supervisor and assessor if I am required to supply your agency/training provider/school with a written report of your practice. My assessment of ethical and effective practice is based on values of respect, transparency, and awareness of the relations of power in the therapeutic relationship. If we find that we practice from different theoretical orientations or different therapeutic approaches to counselling, we will need to fully discuss the effects of such difference. These following criteria are based on my theoretical and philosophical values about professional practice. You may have other criteria you wish to add to this list.

As a student counsellor, I would expect you to demonstrate the following:

1. Listening for understanding rather than interpretation
2. Asking questions that help to develop a client's story in the direction they wish
3. Accounting for the intentions or thinking behind your practice
4. Consulting a client as to the effects of your practice
5. Engaging critically with your practice; reflecting on aspects that worked well/not so well
6. Acknowledging the familial, social and cultural contexts which shape a client's experience
7. Demonstrating ways that you take account of the power relations in the professional relationship

### **Reviewing supervision practice**

A finding from my doctoral research on supervision was the usefulness of video-taping supervision for review. All the research participants, counselling practitioners, found that reflecting on supervision greatly developed their professional practice and identity. As part of my supervision practice, I now request that I video-record at least two supervision sessions per year, more if you wish, which we will both review individually or together in supervision. I am interested in your experience of supervision and how I might continually improve my practice. The following questions are offered as guidelines to assist you when reviewing a DVD of our supervision.

## Questions to assist in reviewing supervision

- What is of interest to you as you watch the tape of our supervision conversation?
- Which parts of the supervision conversation are particularly meaningful for you?
- Why do these moments stand out for you?
- Were there any moments when you noticed our conversation wandered off track or was not of interest to you?
- Did you notice any moments when we were talking from different perspectives or different ideas about counselling?
- How did you make sense of these moments?
- Were there aspects of our talk that were less helpful?
- Which parts of supervision worked really well for you? Why was this?
- Are there any particular parts of our conversation you would like to talk more about?
- Are there any parts of the supervision conversation that you have taken into your work with your clients?
- What were the effects for you and your client when you did this?
- How do you think supervision is contributing to your professional identity? Have you noticed anything in particular in this supervision conversation that supported your counselling practice and your sense of professionalism?

I consider supervision to be an on-going work in progress. Our agreement is a working document that we can alter at any time. I look forward to negotiating how we might work together in supervision, and I look forward to discussing this information and any other thoughts you have about supervision when we meet.

Ireni Esler  
Supervisor

## Appendix 8: Supervision working agreement

This supervision agreement is between (*supervisor*) and (*practitioner*).

Contact details:

### Supervisor

### Practitioner

Home Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Mob: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

How do you prefer to be contacted?

We agree to meet:

Fortnightly      Monthly      6 weekly      other

Fee: (*insert fee*) the normal fee applies should an appointment be missed without notification given, unless in an emergency or illness.

### Ethical Responsibilities

This supervision agreement takes into account the New Zealand Association of Counsellors' Code of Ethics 2002 for supervision practice and (*insert other Codes of Practice/Ethics*)

### Confidentiality and safety

All matters discussed in supervision are confidential unless:

- The safety of the client or practitioner is at risk
- The integrity of the agency or the organisation is at risk
- The integrity of professional ethics is at risk

If I have any concerns about your practice I will discuss these with you in supervision and if we cannot agree or we have any difficulties or conflicts that we cannot resolve, we will both meet with a director/manager of your agency/organisation or a senior practitioner of NZAC, or a member of your professional association.

Records of our supervision conversations will be stored securely and are available at any time for you to refer to. Assessment or evaluations reports will be written in collaboration with you and you will retain a copy of all written reports.

### Your intentions and hopes for supervision

(*Attach written document from practitioner as discussed in previous meeting/s*)

### **Reviewing your practice**

As part of our agreement, you will bring to supervision at least two video/audio recordings of your practice per year or more if required by your training provider or agency. We will review these tapes together and I will ask you to guide me on specific areas on which you wish to receive feedback. If supervision is linked to your performance, and I am required to provide a written report or assessment, we will do this through a collaborative, negotiated process. You will have a copy of any written report we produce together.

### **Reviewing supervision**

Regular review of supervision is an on-going dynamic process and changes can be made at any time. I request that we also have a fixed date for a formal review of our supervision arrangement. From the written information I have provided, I found that recording and reflecting on supervision produced richer accounts of professional practice. As part of my supervision practice, I request that I video-record at least two supervision sessions per year, which we both review either individually or together in supervision.

Accompanying this formal working agreement is information about how I understand the purposes and processes of supervision, and the theoretical assumptions which shape my professional practice. Please feel free to discuss any of this information with me when we meet.

We shall review this agreement in six months' time on \_\_\_\_\_ (insert date) or sooner at your request.

Signed:

Supervisor:

Practitioner:

Date: